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# The Politics of Dignity: Social Christianity and the Making of Global Los Angeles

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# The Politics of Dignity: Social Christianity and the Making of Global Los Angeles

## **Abstract**

ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF DIGNITY: SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE MAKING OF GLOBAL LOS ANGELES

Sean Thomas Dempsey

Thomas J. Sugrue

This dissertation argues that a new form of social Christianity developed in the postwar decades that had a profound impact on the political and social history of Los Angeles. Rooted in, but distinct from, the Social Gospel tradition of ecumenical Protestantism, this form of social Christianity also included important contributions that cut across denominational lines, especially from Roman Catholics and progressive African American congregations. Intellectually and theologically, postwar social Christianity focused on advancing a range of social thought and policy centered on Christian notions of human dignity and was especially interested in responding to the challenges and possibilities of postwar urban centers such as Los Angeles. The interplay of these Christian ideas, practices, and policies which took root in a multitude of congregations and religiously-affiliated organizations in the globalizing city of Los Angeles created a distinctive strain of postwar urban politics, a “politics of dignity.”

This politics of dignity, forged at this vital intersection between postwar social Christianity and the globalizing metropolis of Los Angeles had several characteristics which affected the political and social trajectory of the city and which constitute the heart of this project. First, it created the possibilities for interdenominational and interreligious cooperation on a host urban issues, in part because of postwar theological commitments to interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, and social justice. Second, it was inherently devolutionary, advocating for greater community empowerment and organizing at the grassroots level. Third, it grappled with the increasing pluralism and diversity of Los Angeles by relying on a global and inclusive vision of human community. Fourth, it sought to advance a broad agenda of racial liberalism and economic justice, but in ways that departed significantly from secular counterparts. Lastly, it was internationalist in orientation and increasingly transnational in practice, as post-1965 immigration transformed the religious, racial, and ethnic demographics of Los Angeles. Like Los Angeles itself, the politics of dignity was complex, contradictory and diffuse, but succeeded in offering a moral vision for a city undergoing rapid social change.

## **Degree Type**

Dissertation

## **Degree Name**

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

## **Graduate Group**

History

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**First Advisor**

Thomas J. Sugrue

**Keywords**

dignity, ecumenism, Los Angeles, post-1945, Social Christianity, urban

**Subject Categories**

History

THE POLITICS OF DIGNITY: SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE MAKING OF  
GLOBAL LOS ANGELES

Sean Thomas Dempsey

A DISSERTATION

in

History

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

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THE POLITICS OF DIGNITY: SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE MAKING OF  
GLOBAL LOS ANGELES

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*A.M.D.G.*

## Acknowledgments

At times, my path through graduate studies has felt like a clichéd old Beatles song, a “long and winding road.” After I received my B.A. in English from Notre Dame back in the 1990s, I nearly began a Ph.D. program in literature, only to discover that my true calling was to the Jesuits. Instead of grad school, I embarked on a long period of study and work, culminating in my ordination to the priesthood in 2008. Only then, after having studied broadly in the fields of philosophy, theology, and American Studies, was it time to think about doctoral studies. And so, at long last, did I finally embark on the path toward a doctorate, not in English, but in my other great love, American history. It’s been worth the wait.

Along the way, I have collected more debts, large and small, than I could possibly name or remember, but there are some that stand out. First, to my family, especially my mother, whose love and support I too often take for granted, I am deeply grateful. I am equally thankful for my spiritual family, the Society of Jesus, which over the course of nearly 17 years has provided me with the ride of a lifetime, and to all my brother Jesuits, past and present, who make our life together so much fun.

When you’ve been in school as long as I have, you also rack up your share of mentors, so I’ll also limit that long list to just a few standouts. At Saint Louis University, Matt Mancini and Joseph Heathcott shepherded me through my M.A. thesis and helped rekindle my love of history. It was in one of Joseph’s seminars that I first read Tom Segrue’s work, no doubt planting a seed that only later came to fruition. Elsewhere, the

Jesuit historian Tom Buckley helped guide me into grad school in history, and Michael Engh, also a fellow Jesuit, has long been an inspiration with his work on the religious history of Los Angeles.

At the University of Pennsylvania, I'm indebted, of course, to my advisor, Tom Sugrue, whose commitment to top-flight scholarship, social witness, and deep humanity are unmatched and whose encouragement and support of my project never wavered. Similarly, I am thankful for the wisdom and generosity of Sally Gordon and Amy Offner who inspired me more than they know. And to Michael Katz, who left us far too soon, I offer a note of thanks that could never do justice to the man, or to what he meant for my project.

Finally, thanks go to my friends, without whom this would have been a dreary enterprise indeed. Special thanks go out to the friends I have made at Penn, including current and future superstars such as Rachel Guberman, Mary Catherine French, Emily Merrill, Adam Goodman, and members of the world's greatest cohort (2009), who made all of these years of study a little more worthwhile. To all of you, *un abrazo*.



## ABSTRACT

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This politics of dignity, forged at this vital intersection between postwar social Christianity and the globalizing metropolis of Los Angeles had several characteristics which affected the political and social trajectory of the city and which constitute the heart

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## **Introduction**

This dissertation is about the emergence of a new form of social Christianity in postwar Los Angeles, from roughly the end of the Second World War to the mid-1990s. Rooted in older traditions of the Social Gospel, this new variant of socially-engaged Christianity was truly ecumenical, cutting across denominational and racial lines, and having a direct impact on the political culture and social history of the city. Intellectually and theologically, it was centered on the commitment on the part of “mainstream” Christian churches to notions of human dignity, but even more importantly, reflected changing ideas within these same churches concerning social engagement and Christian witness in the modern world. This dissertation argues that, at the nexus of an evolving Christian social tradition that was global in scope and Los Angeles, a rapidly globalizing metropolis, a distinctive politics emerged, a “politics of dignity.” Although it often tracked as liberal or even progressive in terms of postwar urban politics, it was fundamentally religious, and the policies and practices that emerged from these mainstream churches conformed to a modern Christian vision of human community in an urban context. Its influence was as vast as Los Angeles itself, bringing churches and affiliated organizations into contact with a broad range of social currents in the city, from

the struggle for African American civil rights and the dignity of labor, to concern for immigrants, to more recent efforts to argue for economic justice in an age of neoliberalism. Taken together, this dissertation further argues, this politics of dignity, and the new form of social Christianity that it emerged from, represented a striking contrast to evangelical efforts to “Christianize” American politics during the same period. Not limited to constrained and imprecise notions of a “Christian left,” urban dignitarian politics has left a lasting legacy on the course of U.S. religious history, as well as the history of major American cities such as Los Angeles.

### **Looking Back from 1992**

When pastors, priests, and rabbis in Los Angeles took to their pulpits in May of 1992, their task was daunting. For the second time in fewer than three decades, Los Angeles was burning, its fragile multicultural politics in tatters after the acquittal of the four LAPD officers accused of brutally beating a young African American man named Rodney King sparked civil violence throughout the city. Thousands of Marines and National Guard troops patrolled L.A.’s streets and neighborhoods as civic and religious leaders called for an end to the violence. Churches, especially in the largely African American and Latino epicenter of the riot, South Central Los Angeles, quickly became not only houses of worship, but impromptu town halls where citizens voiced their rage, despair, and sadness at both the political and spiritual state of their city.<sup>1</sup> Preachers from

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, like its 1965 predecessor, is vast. Two of the more well-known works are Gooding-Williams, Robert. *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising* (New York:

across the spectrum of faith traditions seized on the riots as an opportunity to lend spiritual significance to the civil violence occurring, often quite literally, just outside the doors of their churches and synagogues. There were powerful calls, from Pasadena's All Saints Episcopal Church to the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Hollywood, for a renewed commitment to racial and economic justice in both Los Angeles and the United States at large. There were expressions of grief at the destruction of the riots, such as those from Linnea Juanita Pearson of the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles, who proclaimed "this morning we come together with ashes in our mouths...We come with bitterness and mourning." To a remarkable degree, however, what united these preachers in the days and weeks after the 1992 Los Angeles Riot was their prophetic call for the recognition of the essential human dignity of all of Los Angeles' citizens.

Cecil "Chip" Murray, pastor of the influential African American congregation First AME, which counted Mayor Tom Bradley among its congregants, cast the violence as a consequence of a two-fold attack on the dignity of African Americans and on the law itself. Relating the Gospel story of the Good Shepherd to the verdict in the Rodney King police brutality trial, Murray proclaimed: "And the jury charged to lift up the dignity of the law--the law of our land given to us by the law of God, the law that's so sacred that when it is absent...we cannot live in peace...they say...'we love all of the sheep except the black sheep.'" K. Samuel Lee, pastor of the First Korean United Methodist Church, whose community bore the brunt of much of the rioting, similarly argued for racial equity and justice, as well as a realization of "our common struggles and destiny as human

beings with a common vision for a better world.” Bob Fambrini, the Jesuit pastor of Hollywood’s Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, extended his call for dignity beyond those directly involved in the riots, enjoining his congregation to “check your attitudes about Jews, lesbians and gays, the homeless and the immigrant among you.” At the conclusion of his post-riot homily, Fambrini looked forward with great hope to “our journey toward rebuilding a new city that respects the rights and dignity of all its people.”<sup>2</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss these sermons and reflections, delivered as the smoke from the riots still hung in the L.A. air, as mere bromides, the spiritual equivalent of Rodney King’s own famous, and somewhat naive, televised plea for peace, “Can we all get along?” However, the theological language of human dignity, the call for social and racial justice in American society, and the desire to build a “new city” where people of all races, faiths, and sexual orientations could live harmoniously that courses through so many of these religious leaders’ responses to the 1992 Riots were actually decades in the making, reflecting a set of complex changes in the postwar religious and political landscape, especially in major American cities such as Los Angeles.

From a religious perspective, these changes involved theological developments that emerged in the postwar years that drew on older traditions of social Christianity together with postwar policies centered on notions of human dignity to create a new kind

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<sup>2</sup> Transcriptions of the post-uprising sermons quoted here can all be found in *Dreams on Fire, Embers of Hope: From the Pulpits of Los Angeles After the Riots*, Ignacio Castuera, ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1992).

of Social Gospel.<sup>3</sup> These powerful currents played out not only in seminaries and local church councils, but in urban congregations and religious communities that confronted a host of issues ranging from civil rights for African Americans and gays, to immigration, homelessness, and beyond, most especially in the crucial decades of the 1960s to the 1980s. At its core, this strand of urban religious engagement was broadly liberal and even progressive, with a focus on ecumenism, interfaith cooperation, and justice for the marginalized, but its concerns never mapped precisely onto the secular liberalism of the period. Rather, a central argument of this dissertation will be that these distinctly urban religious groups and organizations articulated, to borrow a phrase from historian Mark Silk, a “spiritual politics” of their own during these years of urban crisis-- a politics of dignity.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Politics of Dignity**

This dissertation seeks to bring together two usually distinct strands of historical inquiry, one intellectual and religious, while the other is urban, social, and political. The first strand deals with the development of the social thought of “mainstream” Christian groups in the postwar period, including liberal Protestants, Roman Catholics, and

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<sup>3</sup> The best introduction to the myriad ways in which Christian churches across all the major denominations dealt with urban issues after 1945 is *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945-1985*, Clifford J. Green, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America Since World War II* (New York: Touchstone, 1989). This project seeks to look at a broadly shared religious idea, dignity, at explore how it circulated in postwar Los Angeles. It is not, and indeed cannot, be comprehensive, but rather looks across traditions to find points of convergence and divergence of religious thought and practice. I hope that this will be one way of doing religious history that is not dependent on a particular church, denomination, or faith tradition.



progressive African American churches.<sup>5</sup> Although this might seem a hopelessly variegated assortment, by the 1960s representatives from these three groups constituted a new kind of religious establishment, especially in large American cities such as Los Angeles. During Tom Bradley's long tenure as mayor, for example, leaders and activists from these four groups were continually tapped to sit on city-wide commissions, spearhead community development, work toward solutions to crime and violence, and to help integrate immigrants into the community. Always including Jewish groups, in time this establishment would also include Muslim and Buddhist leaders, but in its origins, it was a product of the "tri-faith" model of Protestant-Catholic-Jew made famous by sociologist Will Herberg in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, these groups were often most interested in dialoguing and cooperating with one another, and articulated a surprisingly coherent civic vision inspired by their religious faith and by a developing tradition of religious social thought. In turn, this social thought would both frame and comment upon many of the most vital issues of the postwar period, from immigration policy to the AIDS crisis and other urban affairs.

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term religious "mainstream" advisedly and cautiously. Many scholars would debate the existence of such a religious mainstream in the first place, arguing instead, as R. Laurence Moore does in his work *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford, 1986), that such a mainstream is more myth than reality in American religious life. However, by mainstream I mean those religious institutions and leaders who had a well-articulated social policy and had at least some access to political influence in my period.

<sup>6</sup> This tri-faith model has recently been analyzed historically in Kevin Schultz's work, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 26-29. However, Schultz notes that this model encouraged a kind of tripartite religious separatism that replaced the old model of a religious (and implicitly Protestant) "melting pot." However, I have found that, at the level of urban politics and religious activism, these lines were much more blurry and easily crossed than his work suggests.

The influence of the thought and practices of these three main groups was in no way equally dispersed, but it would be difficult, and perhaps unwise, to attempt to quantify it. Roman Catholics, largely because of post-1965 immigration to Los Angeles from Latin America, became far and away the largest single religious group in the city by the end of the twentieth century. However, many Catholics remained politically and theologically conservative in this period, and only some could be said to have actively sought to implement Catholic social teaching in the city. Conversely, the relatively small African American community in Los Angeles achieved a great deal of influence, especially during the Bradley administration, and was able to advance a good deal of their social agenda in the postwar decades, despite the persistent effects of racial exclusion. Moreover, the Los Angeles Jewish community, although by no means monolithic, was one of the largest and most socially active in the world and played an utterly central role in the development of a religious social vision in the city. Finally, despite the well-worn idea that liberal Protestants went into decline in the postwar years, especially after the 1960s, many of the Southern California Ecumenical Council's greatest social achievements, including the founding of the El Rescate organization for the aid of Salvadoran immigrants, occurred in the 1970s and 80s. The influence of more liberal religious social thought can therefore not be reduced to numbers, but must be sought in the tangible ways in which influenced the civic and political life of the postwar city.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There is a great deal of literature, scattered over many subfields, which treat the political influence of the various groups under discussion in Los Angeles. For example, Raphael Sonenshein's *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) deals with the alliance between Westside Jews and blacks in South Los Angeles that helped elect Tom Bradley as mayor

The second line of inquiry of this project concerns, therefore, how this social thought and policy played out in the context of postwar Los Angeles, a globalizing and extraordinarily pluralistic city.<sup>8</sup> In seeking to implement postwar Christian social policy, religious groups pioneered new forms of congregation-based community organizing, fought for the rights of immigrants, initiated interreligious dialogue around civic and theological issues, developed innovative strategies of community economic development, and were on the frontlines of healing the wounds from two rounds of civil violence in a deeply racialized and unequal city. A major contention of this project is that, at the nexus of ecumenical Christian social thought and the massive social changes of postwar Los Angeles, a new kind of distinctively urban politics was forged that was grounded in very particular notions of the struggle for human dignity that were developed by various churches and religious organizations in the postwar period.<sup>9</sup> Almost the entirety of

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in 1973. However, he makes little of the ways in which religion helped forge this alliance. Much of the small amount of literature that treats Judaism in Los Angeles, such as Deborah Dash Moore's *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994), deals specifically with the development of a Sunbelt brand of Jewish identity. For Roman Catholicism in Los Angeles, very little in general has been written, apart from the somewhat hagiographical works by the archdiocesan archivist Francis Weber, such as *His Eminence: James Francis Cardinal McIntyre* (Los Angeles: Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> I take historian Scott Kurashige's notion, which he develops in *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1-12, 259-285, of the transformation of Los Angeles from the nation's "white spot" to a global city in the postwar decades as an intellectual starting place. Although Kurashige is one of the few historians as of yet to deal with Los Angeles in global terms, scholars in many other fields have taken up this task. See, for example, *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 3-50, that places the economic dynamics of the city and region in specifically global terms.

<sup>9</sup> Because dignity has very recently become a major topic of scholarly discussion, a nuanced understanding of my use of the term is in order here. The work of intellectual historian Samuel Moyn, for example, has focused on the roots of dignity in prewar European Catholic politics, while political philosophers have tended to place its origins in Kant and the Enlightenment and linked it to the emergence of human rights discourse. This project, however, focuses on the concrete ways that postwar religious organizations marshaled the term as a way of focusing its social ethics and policy prescriptions. The interventions of these other scholars are certainly not unimportant, and lend texture to my arguments. As an intellectual

postwar religious social policy among the mainstream Christian churches (and allied Jewish groups) sought to safeguard and advance “human dignity,” but this central concept never remained merely abstract. The institutional network that was informed by this kind of religious social thought was vast and deeply influential, but has remained understudied. Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, Church Women United, the Southern California Ecumenical Council, the Southern California Board of Rabbis, the American Friends Service Committee, the South Central Organizing Committee, and the United Neighborhood Organization were just a few of the many organizations that partnered with secular groups, funded new projects, and animated churches and synagogues in the promotion of dignity in Los Angeles. Collectively, these organizations helped provide a dizzying area of services to urban neighborhoods, from legal aid to immigrants, to homeless shelters, low-income housing, AIDS hospices, and beyond. Equally important for this study, however, are the ways in which these groups helped to shape the civic and political culture of the city on behalf of the marginalized and circulated religiously-inspired notions of dignity.

Although the global dimensions of postwar Christian social policy might suggest a similarly capacious study that spanned the globe (or at least the nation), Los Angeles recommends itself as a case study for several important reasons. While not necessarily the site of the most innovative forms of urban religious activism (Chicago, with its experimental programs, especially among its black churches during the 1960s and beyond, would take this prize), Los Angeles was nevertheless a place of immense

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concept, dignity has been enormously important and yet somewhat ill-defined and poorly-understood. This project seeks to add to the emerging scholarly conversations about dignity in the modern world.

religious and ethnic diversity, and just as importantly for this study, of a diversity of institutions and practices that all sought, in their own particular ways, to instantiate religious social policy on an urban level. Moreover, Tom Bradley's long tenure as mayor of Los Angeles (1973-1993) meant that his brand of multiracial urban liberalism provided a long-term (and relatively politically stable) partner for many of the religious actors and institutions under discussion. Indeed, postwar urban liberalism in the mode of Tom Bradley became, in many important respects, a primary facilitator of much of the religious urban practice and policy in the period, powerfully shaping both the possibilities and limitations of its effects.

Perhaps more crucial, however, was Los Angeles' vast waves of immigration, especially after the 1965 immigration reforms, that also had the effect of upending the religious composition of the city and its surrounding region. Together with the civil violence of 1965 and 1992, there was no greater impetus for religious institutions to argue for and defend human dignity than the various social upheavals brought on by rapid demographic change inside and outside the walls of religious organizations.

These religiously-inspired forms of dignity had several distinctive characteristics that would come to inform urban politics in Los Angeles and in other American cities. First, the politics of dignity was global, even world-building in scope, but was thought to be best realized in smaller communities, neighborhoods, and congregations. Therefore, this politics was inherently devolutionary, and rarely sought to form coalitions beyond the local level. Long before the devolution brought on by the rollback of federal aid to cities in the 1970s, religious groups were actively proposing local initiatives as the

solution to a range of problems, including poverty and racism. Second, it was an intellectual, even elite movement that cut across denominational lines in the Christian world and intersected with other faiths, primarily Judaism. Despite its elite origins, it nevertheless engaged a grassroots constituency in many neighborhoods, especially in racially and economically marginalized areas such as South Central and East Los Angeles. Third, it was committed to racial equality, but usually framed its activism on behalf of civil rights in its broader social and moral vision. Moreover, its interracialism was always and everywhere intertwined with its interreligious and ecumenical ambitions, as evidenced by the importance of Jewish groups in this study. Fourth, the politics of dignity was comfortable with modernity and the possibilities of the “secular city.” Postwar theologians and activists were often fascinated by cities precisely because urban spaces epitomized the struggles and hopes of the world, and as a result much of the religious activism of the period actively entered into partnerships and coalitions with secular organizations pursuing similar goals.

The intellectual and practical characteristics of liberal religious civic engagement in the postwar period suggest strengths and achievements, as well as significant limitations and constraints. To be sure, there was an enormous amount of diversity and even tension between the social thought and practices of these divergent groups. Liberal African American religious leaders quite understandably placed civil rights and the long freedom struggle at the center of their social engagement, while Catholics, for example, were often more concerned with issues surrounding the dignity of labor and labor organizing, as seen in the Church’s involvement with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm

Workers. Moreover, these differences in religious style and substance often led to significant tensions within would-be interdenominational and interfaith coalitions, such as those between community organizations in Los Angeles that had lay Catholic leadership and those led by African American clergy, that made cooperation between largely Latino East L.A. and African American South Central L.A. more difficult.

The global perspective that was so pervasive among the leaders of the new urban Christian mainstream also came with its share of limitations. Rather than remaining sharply focused on the immediate concerns of the postwar American city, including deindustrialization, racism (inside and outside the churches), and declining federal aid to cities, religious leaders often chose to devote their energies and institutional resources to international justice issues, such as ending American military involvement in El Salvador and nuclear disarmament. As crucial as these issues were, there are ways in which the moral vision of religious institutions in this period was almost too far-sighted, failing to address the more proximate causes of the urban crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, there was a remarkable convergence of social thought and civic engagement among mainstream Christian leaders, activists, and organizations in the postwar decades, especially concerning issues dealing with the fate of the postwar city and its place within the global community. This convergence represented, in historical hindsight, a new strand of social Christianity, rooted in thought that was increasingly ecumenical, cutting across the age-old divisions of liberal Protestants and Roman

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<sup>10</sup> There is a sense in which many of these mainstream religious groups were intent on importing perspectives and practices from the developing world into the U.S. In a way, a major point of divergence between mainstream and evangelical groups in the way in which the latter sought to export American religiosity, while the former did something nearly opposite.

Catholics, and including major contributions from progressive African American congregations. Despite the great diversity of religious groups under discussion here, what united them was a sustained intellectual and religious engagement with the city and its social issues, especially race relations, economic justice, and the broader issues raised by increasing pluralism and secularization. This convergence can at least be partially explained by an ecumenical turn in Christian theology and social ethics, as well as a new openness to interfaith dialogue, especially with those Jewish groups, such as the American Jewish Committee, that often initiated it. As historian Kevin Schultz has argued, this convergence of Catholic, liberal Protestant, and Jewish civic engagement was itself a political project, initiated during the Cold War as a way of building stability and consensus in American society after World War II, and later “softening the ground” for the civil rights movement.<sup>11</sup>

However, there was another, less-explored point of commonality between mainstream Christian leaders across denominations and faith traditions in this period, namely, their participation in global networks that often placed the moral and political concerns of the developing world at the center of their theological inquiry and social engagement.<sup>12</sup> In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded by 147 different Protestant churches, the most ambitious and wide-ranging effort of the Ecumenical Movement that dated back to the nineteenth century and one that fostered a

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<sup>11</sup> See Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 73-89.

<sup>12</sup> Many scholars have recently noted the over-use of the concept of networks among historians. However, in this case, these networks were quite real, tangible, and consequential. Nevertheless, local contexts remained important. The problems and concerns that confronted religious activists in Los Angeles were quite different from those in other American cities and international locations. Therefore, arguments for dignity took different shapes and forms in different contexts.



more progressive, global brand of religious thought and practice than that of the more conservative, evangelical Christian churches that pointedly refused to join the WCC. The formation of the WCC had more than symbolic value, as it quickly developed its own tradition of social thought that had a profound impact on its member churches in the United States, weighing in on a host of crucial issues, including race relations, the economic organization of society, ecumenism, and human rights from a religious, and often decidedly liberal, perspective. By the 1960s, American theologians associated with WCC-member churches, such as Harvey Cox and George Younger, would turn their intellectual energies increasingly to the problems of cities themselves, in which these global issues manifested themselves most urgently.

Roman Catholicism had, of course, always been a global network of sorts, but also underwent profound shifts in its social thought in the postwar period. Building on its growing tradition of papal pronouncements on social issues that had begun with Pope Leo XIII's influential encyclical of 1893, *Rerum Novarum*, which argued for the dignity of labor and proper role of government in safeguarding the rights of labor organizations, the Catholic Church became increasingly engaged after World War II in issues concerning the "progress of peoples" and global development. In part, this was a consequence of Catholicism's growth in the developing world, as a native-born church gradually replaced the mostly European missionaries who had dramatically extended the Church's reach during the colonial era in places such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia. However, these developments in what has become known as Catholic Social Teaching also reflected a growing appreciation within the Catholic Church of ecumenical

cooperation, interfaith dialogue, and social outreach that would be institutionalized in the various modernizing pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council (1962-5). Much like their “separated brethren” in the WCC, many Catholic leaders and activists in the United States recognized the importance of cities in the realization of the Church’s emerging social agenda.

As complex as the social thought of ecumenical Protestantism and Roman Catholicism was in the postwar period, African American churches are perhaps even more difficult to classify, but they nevertheless play an essential role in this study. Unlike the more institutionalized, even bureaucratic, “mainline” Christian churches that produced policy statements on a local, national, and international level, African American churches tended to be far more decentralized, with the nature of their social and political engagement often dependent on the particular minister that led a given congregation. As historian Barbara Savage has noted, by no means all of the black churches can be classified as activist or progressive, even on racial issues, and certainly not on theological ones.<sup>13</sup> However, an important strand of African American Christianity in the United States has long been more theologically liberal, promoting ecumenism alongside racial justice and a more broadly progressive social agenda. In Los Angeles, several prominent African American congregations, including First AME, Second Baptist, and Holman United Methodist, fell into this category, and their leadership and members became an important collective voice in the city for civil rights, as well as for economic justice and other social concerns that transcended racial and religious divides. Moreover, the pastors

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<sup>13</sup> See Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008), 68-120.

of these congregations, including Thomas Kilgore of Second Baptist, who served from 1963 to 1985, and H.H. Brookins of First AME, were deeply shaped not only by the freedom struggle in the United States, but also by decolonization in Africa and fight against South African apartheid. It is certainly no coincidence that those African American congregations in Los Angeles that were most deeply connected with global issues were also those most closely connected with other churches and synagogues that shared this robust social and religious vision, rooted in notions of a shared human dignity.

Mostly absent from much of this study are the self-described evangelical churches that charted a very different religious and political path in the postwar decades, as a welter of recent historiography has shown.<sup>14</sup> Historian Darren Dochuk, in his own work on religion in Southern California, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, has argued that the most important religious development in the region was the growth of “plain-folk religion,” owing to the migration of evangelical whites from the South during the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> The social and political agenda of adherents of this strain of evangelical Christianity would, according to Dochuk, deeply inform the formation of the “religious right” and the rightward turn of American politics more generally beginning in the 1970s. Despite the divergent religious trajectory of the evangelical churches in the postwar period, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that evangelicals were completely absent from either what I am calling the politics of dignity, or with urban

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<sup>14</sup> This literature, although a relatively recent arrival on the historical scene, has already become quite substantial. See, for example, Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Daniel Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), among many others.

<sup>15</sup> See Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 3-26.

engagement more generally. Indeed, by the 1990s, many evangelical groups were promoting community economic development programs and others kinds of “economic dignity” as a way of alleviating the ills of the neoliberal city. What becomes apparent in this study, then, is not so much the political polarization of mainstream and evangelical religious groups, but rather the importance of the spatial dimension of these groups. In other words, those religious organizations that directly confronted the shifting grounds of urban life in cities such as Los Angeles often approached these changes in ways that converged, whatever their theological convictions and differences.

Even though the social thought of these various religious groups shared some important intellectual characteristics, they may never have come together if it weren’t for the second major component of this study, the historical context of the postwar American city, and Los Angeles in particular.

### **Postwar Los Angeles**

In the postwar decades, Los Angeles was a city undergoing major shifts in its economic, racial, ethnic, and religious composition. Once one of the nation’s “white spots,” settled largely by white, middle-class Midwesterners drawn to the Southern California by promises of perfect weather and inexpensive real estate by civic boosters (albeit with a racialized underclass), Los Angeles rapidly became a global city characterized not only by racial and ethnic diversity and growing importance in the world economy, but also by increasing levels of economic inequality, racial exclusion, and draconian police tactics. Historian Scott Kurashige has persuasively argued that the

transition of Los Angeles into a world city, despite its overtones of progressive multiculturalism, was itself a process deeply implicated in the “shifting grounds of race,” rather than an end to the city’s “white-washed” past.<sup>16</sup>

Religiously, however, Los Angeles had long been known for its “diversity and multiplicity of faiths,” as historian Michael Engh has noted. The city was also known as a place of great religious experimentation and in the early twentieth century witnessed the great Pentecostal revival at Azusa Street, as well as the founding of the Church of Scientology and the rapid growth of Mormonism. Nevertheless, the postwar period was also marked by a set of complex changes in the religious makeup of Los Angeles, in ways that both increased its religious pluralism and altered the composition of its religious establishment. Despite its deserved reputation as a place of enormous religious diversity, many of the most established religious communities in Los Angeles before World War II belonged to what would eventually come to be known as mainline, or ecumenical, Protestantism.<sup>17</sup> Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion among the Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American community, but had a relatively low profile within Anglo Los Angeles, although Archbishop Cantwell (1922-1947) worked diligently to increase Catholicism’s stature among the city’s business and political elite. Jews, although long present in Los Angeles, especially in the Eastside neighborhood of Boyle Heights, grew in size dramatically only after WWII, especially through the migration of

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<sup>16</sup> Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multi-Ethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 7-12.

<sup>17</sup> For a rare historical exploration of religious pluralism in late-nineteenth Los Angeles, see Michael Engh, *Frontier Faiths: Church, Temple, and Synagogue in Los Angeles, 1846-1888* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992).

East Coast Jews to the West Coast. Similarly, African Americans, drawn to Los Angeles by defense-related jobs during and after the war in large part from Texas and Louisiana, also grew in number, leading to the establishment of a number of new black congregations that became important players in the city's political and religious landscape.<sup>18</sup>

Increased levels of immigration, especially after the immigration reforms of 1965, had a somewhat curious effect on the religious composition of Los Angeles. In one way, the influx of new immigrants dramatically increased the sheer number of religions practiced in the city, making Los Angeles perhaps the most religiously diverse city in the world. However, because so much of this immigration was from Latin America, the city was at the same time becoming far more Catholic in terms of its adherents, as Mike Davis and others have astutely noted.<sup>19</sup> Unlike other American cities such as Boston and Chicago that had become largely Catholic in earlier periods through immigration from Europe, Los Angeles Catholicism was deeply shaped by its Latin American roots, evidenced by its mix of devotionism and commitment to social justice concerns. Nevertheless, this version of Catholicism often contended with a more conservative, institutional strain of the Catholic Church, best exemplified by its long-serving archbishop, Cardinal James McIntyre.

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<sup>18</sup> See the work of George Sanchez, especially *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), 63-86, for a discussion of the changing demography of key immigrant neighborhoods such as Boyle Heights.

<sup>19</sup> See Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* (New York: Verso, 2001), 49-60.

Social Christianity, and the dignitarian politics in Los Angeles that emerged from it, was, therefore, not always easy to recognize in the welter of religious expression in postwar Los Angeles. Nevertheless, there now exists enough historical distance to take the measure of a movement of which many of the actors depicted here were perhaps only dimly aware. But that does not diminish the historical legacies, many positive, others less so, that postwar social Christianity has left on Los Angeles and on American cities more generally.

## Chapter 1

### **Trials by Fire: Remaking Social Christianity in Postwar Los Angeles**

In 1944, Los Angeles mayor Fletcher Bowron formed a committee for home front unity, comprised of leaders of different racial, political, and religious groups. The committee, which was chaired by Catholic auxiliary bishop Joseph McGucken and included local NAACP chair Thomas Griffith and the pastor of the African American Second Baptist Church, J. Raymond Henderson, was to work for unity among the city's already diverse populations for the sake of the wartime industrial production. The committee's opening statement argued that, despite efforts by "subversive" elements to disrupt the war effort, in Los Angeles "unity is our weapon, waiting at hand, to deal with the forces which would prevent the Los Angeles community from carrying out the nation's largest production assignment...This is the responsibility of all our people—all races, all colors, all creeds."<sup>20</sup>

Later that same year, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the sharing of pulpits and worship space among the city's Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic communities, and a spirit of cooperation among the city's religious adherents that went beyond "mere religious tolerance." That cooperation also included combined efforts to provide

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<sup>20</sup> "Mayor Names Interracial Body in Los Angeles," (1944, Jan 22). *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967)* Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/492737118>.



charitable services and even an annual “Race-relations Sunday” in which churches exchanged preachers and choirs across denominational and racial divides once a year to promote greater civic unity. *Times* reporter James Warnack made clear that these practices were deeply rooted in the culture of Los Angeles, where “even if denominationalists were disposed to quarrel, they probably would not do so because they realize the danger and folly of manifestations of inharmony [*sic*] in a city in which there are so many faiths represented.”<sup>21</sup>

As historian Kevin Schultz has argued, civic-minded calls for interdenominational and interfaith unity such as these, which began during the Second World War and extended well into the Cold War, were part of an important political project that helped shape the consensus politics familiar to any student of the period.<sup>22</sup> Underlying this U.S.-centric project, however, were the concerns of mainstream Christian churches, which were developing their own agenda for a postwar order, that included vital notions of ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and an internationalist perspective on world order. Following from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which placed basic human dignity at the center of social concern, churches in the United States sought to implement a moral vision specific to American contexts. But churches, from ecumenical Protestants to Roman Catholics and beyond, did not merely lend their moral weight to the developing regime of human rights. Rather, they embarked, unevenly but significantly, to unfold a Christian vision for postwar society, with important implications in the areas

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<sup>21</sup> James Warnack, “Church Leaders Practice Spirit of Tolerance here.” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Oct 01, 1944. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/165543038>.

<sup>22</sup> See Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America* (New York: Oxford Press, 2011), 3-42.

of labor and civil rights. In the process, and in ways that were both global and local, social Christianity was remade, as a pluralistic vision of American society in which the dignity of labor and concern for civil rights took center stage.<sup>23</sup>

Despite official sanction from church bodies at the local, national, and international level, this social vision was fiercely contested, often from within the churches themselves. Alternative, more conservative notions of a Christian America took shape, as historian Kevin Kruse has recently noted, in part as a concerted response to the New Deal order.<sup>24</sup> Evangelical Christians were at the forefront of this very different version of postwar Christian social witness, but Catholics and even liberal Protestants joined in as well. In the complex political and religious world of Cold War America, it was by no means certain that the emerging social vision of the mainstream churches around labor and civil rights would survive.

This fraught unfolding of postwar social Christianity on the local level of Los Angeles is the subject of this chapter. In the pre-Vatican II era, lingering distrust between Roman Catholics and ecumenical Protestants posed a significant barrier to interdenominational cooperation or any kind of shared vision, despite the growing convergence of Catholic and Protestant social thought, especially on social issues. Moreover, white churches in general failed to promote the more vigorous notions of

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<sup>23</sup> See David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18-49. Hollinger discusses the lasting influence of liberal Protestantism on American culture, even after its supposed decline after the 1960s.

<sup>24</sup> See Kevin Kruse, *One Nation under God*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Kruse argues that the nation of a “Christian America” was formulated during the New Deal and after as a way to leverage religious institutions in the struggle of business against FDR’s social and economic policies. The social Christianity that I am describing here had far fewer ties to business, and was generally amenable to the New Deal.

human dignity, linking economic and racial justice, advanced by African American church leaders like Martin Luther King. Nevertheless, the contours of “the politics of dignity” managed to take shape in postwar Los Angeles, despite its many trials and lost opportunities.<sup>25</sup>

### **Dignity’s Central Role in Postwar Religious Thought and Action**

In 1953, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, speaking in the name of the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States, issued a statement outlining its social teaching in a document entitled, “The Dignity of Man.” It began with a traditional appeal to Catholic doctrine, with its distinctive blend of philosophical and theological reasoning, arguing for the inherent dignity of all human beings predicated on their relationship with God, the “mode of [human] existence,” and the “nobility of [human] destiny.”<sup>26</sup> Despite beginning with this series of intellectualized abstractions, the document soon turned to its primary focus: the economy, labor, and education as fundamental areas of American life in which dignity must be protected. While arguing in favor of private property, the Bishops also noted that all economic activity must serve the common good. This

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<sup>25</sup> The literature on the broader engagement of church groups, black and white, in the civil rights movement is large. See especially, David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2005, and James F. Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 48-75, as well as Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009), 219-230, on religious groups and open housing. Most of this literature, however, focuses in on the national movement, especially in the South, rather than on the efforts of churches in specific cities.

<sup>26</sup> Special to *The New York Times*, “Text of Statement by Catholic Bishops in U. S. on ‘Dignity of Man’.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 22, 1953.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/112710222?accountid=14707>.

instruction was in keeping with the longer history of Catholic Social Teaching, which began in 1893 with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, which set out a vision of economic activity rooted in strongly communitarian values as a check on the excesses of nineteenth century capitalism.

Inextricably connected with the Bishops' notion that the economy was meant to serve the common good of all people was the idea that human labor possessed dignity in its own right and that labor unions represented the best means for the dignity of the working class to be recognized and assured. The Catholic Church had similarly developed its teaching on labor and labor unions through the various social encyclicals, beginning with those of Leo XII and continuing throughout the twentieth century's various papacies. In 1953, the American bishops were therefore attempting to apply what was already an established Catholic position on the economy and labor to the changing circumstances of the postwar world, most notably the emergence of the capitalist West and Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc as rivals for ideological supremacy. "The worker is not a hand, as individualistic capitalism contends; not a stomach to be fed by commissars, as communism thinks; but a person," the bishops wrote, worrying that the bipolar postwar world left little room for the Catholic vision of society.<sup>27</sup>

The bishops concluded their 1953 statement with both a plea for, and a compelling defense of, the centrality of dignity as an organizing principle of all human society, and therefore of the American political order as well. "We must...expend every effort to see that this dignity is...nurtured by society, guarded by the state, stabilized by

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

private ownership and exercised through creative activity,” the bishops argued, but in their view they were not merely offering a lesson in Catholic political theory. Rather, the American bishops, a group that included the archbishop of Los Angeles, Cardinal McIntyre, warned Catholics and non-Catholics alike that a failure to recognize human dignity would result in “increasing chaos,” and a world potentially destroyed, if not by moral decay, then by nuclear annihilation.<sup>28</sup>

In 1955, two years after the American Catholic bishops admonished the American public for its growing inattention to human dignity, a young preacher named Martin Luther King, Jr. invoked the term for very different purposes. Speaking at the the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, King sought to rally the congregation for the action that would become known as the Montgomery Bus Boycott. After powerfully detailing the long history of the oppression of African Americans throughout American history, King concluded his speech with a recognition of fundamental human dignity: “And we will not be content until oppression is wiped out of Montgomery, and really out of America...We are merely insisting on the dignity and worth of every human personality.”<sup>29</sup> In subsequent sermons and speeches, King elaborated on this notion of

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> “Address to the First Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) Mass Meeting”. Web. 13 Apr. 2015. [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/the\\_address\\_to\\_the\\_first\\_montgomery\\_improvement\\_association\\_mia\\_mass\\_meeting/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/the_address_to_the_first_montgomery_improvement_association_mia_mass_meeting/)

dignity, powerfully linking it with his calls for economic, as well as racial, justice in the United States and indeed around the world.<sup>30</sup>

King's thought and activism revealed that, despite its deep roots in Catholic social thought, dignity was by no means the exclusive province of Catholicism. It also coursed through the religious and political thought of the African American churches, especially as a theological justification for the freedom struggle. As might be expected, the African American notion of dignity was not synonymous with its Catholic counterpart, although there were significant points of convergence. Of course, a major focus of the African American conception of dignity was racial justice and the overthrow of the white supremacist political order in the American South, as well as the broader regimes of discrimination and racial humiliation throughout American society.

At least part of the explanation for such a remarkable convergence of the social and political policies of such otherwise disparate American Christian denominations-- from African American Baptist, to Roman Catholic, to mainline Protestant-- can be traced to the primary role assigned to human dignity in international, postwar agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. However, historians such as Samuel Moyn have argued that the deeper roots of international dignity lie not only in the desire of the war's victors to prevent another genocide like that of the Holocaust, but in the prewar political culture of largely Catholic nations such as Ireland.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the

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<sup>30</sup> King, of course, has inspired countless books on his thought and social activism. For the ways in which King's thought, including his idea of dignity, developed throughout his career, see especially, Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1-50.

<sup>31</sup> See Samuel Moyn, "The Secret History of Constitutional Dignity" (October 9, 2012), SSRN.

Irish Republic's constitution of 1937 enshrines the notion of human dignity, representing what Moyn calls a turn to "constitutional dignity" that sought to salvage an imperiled liberal democracy by adding a theological mandate grounded in the concept of human dignity.

Apart from the contributions of prewar Catholic political culture, Catholic intellectuals also played a decisive role in promoting human dignity as a basis for human rights and international social order. Most prominent among these was the lay French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, whose modern version of classic, Thomistic thought argued for the inclusion of more communitarian values than were generally allowed for in modern political philosophy. Dignity, of not only the individual, but also of corporate entities such as trade unions, churches, and fraternal organizations, played a crucial role in Maritain's thought, and would exert a direct intellectual influence on the drafting of the UDHR, as historian Mary Ann Glendon has persuasively argued.<sup>32</sup>

But it would be in local contexts that social Christianity's new trajectories would be revealed. One of the most compelling figures to emerge in the early Cold War years was the Jesuit priest George Dunne, who placed concerns over race and labor at the center of his internationalist Christian perspective in a variety of ways.

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<sup>32</sup> See Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2002), 144-146.

### George Dunne and Dignity in Cold War Los Angeles

Not long before Christmas in 1945, O'Day Short, along with his wife and two young children, burned to death in a fire in their suburban Fontana, California home outside of Los Angeles. The Short family was African American, and O'Day Short had been active in the local chapter of the NAACP, working courageously to desegregate Los Angeles area neighborhoods that still practiced racial exclusion through the use of restrictive covenants. When the Short family had moved to their new Fontana home in the fall of 1945, they had been warned by local whites, who would later be characterized as vigilantes, to move out of the area immediately, lest they suffer the consequences of crossing the city's color line. Suffer they did. Although investigators from San Bernardino County would claim that there was no evidence of foul play, an independent investigation commissioned by the Los Angeles NAACP found that the Short's house had been doused with highly flammable oil sometime before the explosion that quickly consumed the house and claimed the lives of the entire Short family. No charges were ever filed, and after a brief moment of notoriety, especially among leftist political circles in Los Angeles, the Short case quickly faded from view, a footnote in the long and painful history of racial terror in the pre-civil rights era.

These are the contours of the Short case as they are recounted in Mike Davis' classic work of historical "excavation," *City of Quartz*, but they do not represent the entire story.<sup>33</sup> What Davis fails to mention is that the Shorts were black Catholics, and

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<sup>33</sup> See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990), 397ff.



that shortly after the fire, Mrs. Short's sister called on Father George Dunne, a young Jesuit priest teaching political science at Loyola University of Los Angeles, as well as the attorney Dan Marshall, Dunne's friend and founder of the Catholic Interracial Council of Los Angeles, to relate the details of what she considered a case of racially-inspired murder. Dunne responded by bringing the case to the attention of a national Catholic audience by writing two scathing articles indicting the San Bernardino District Attorney for negligence in the liberal Catholic periodical, *Commonweal*, in 1946, and later writing a stage play called "Trial by Fire," based on the Short case that played to audiences throughout the country beginning that same year.<sup>34</sup> While the tragic story of the Short family might never have received the attention it was due from either the mainstream media or the justice system, Dunne, Marshall, and other progressive Catholics in Los Angeles worked assiduously to make the story known to the wider public and focused squarely on the failure of Christian organizations to publicize the issue in the face of official silence. As Dunne wrote, "We have waited in vain for the thunderous roar of protest from pulpit and platform. We have hoped in vain that there would be a mass meeting in Olympic auditorium, a meeting, sponsored by Christian organizations, where resolutions would be passed calling upon the public authorities to reopen this case and conduct an exhaustive investigation."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> George H. Dunne, "The Short Case," *Commonweal*, (Mar. 1, 1946), 494-497; George H. Dunne, "No Accident!" *Commonweal*, (May 24, 1946), 134-138.

<sup>35</sup> George H. Dunne, "The Short Case," *Commonweal*, (Mar. 1, 1946), 495.

Dunne's involvement with the Short case was only one aspect of his wider political engagement with progressive causes, Catholic and otherwise, in the early years of the Cold War. In addition to writing about the tragedy in Fontana, Dunne was also involved in efforts to establish a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in California, supported Dan Marshall in the landmark California Supreme Court case, *Perez v. Sharp*, which overturned the ban on interracial marriage in 1948, and played a pivotal role in assisting the insurgent Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) in their long and sometimes bloody battle with the Hollywood studios after the war. Moreover, Dunne provided an unambiguous theological and intellectual foundation for Catholic interracialism by becoming the first Catholic cleric to declare segregation a sin against charity in an article published 1945, and even called for Catholics to work constructively with democratic socialists for the common good in another article that same year.<sup>36</sup>

Dunne's political and religious commitments in the immediate postwar years brought him into the same orbit as a host of activists that comprised the left/liberal/labor coalition in Los Angeles, especially on issues of race and labor, that included figures such as Los Angeles CIO head Philip "Slim" Connelly, a practicing Catholic and Communist Party member who was among the many leftists purged from the labor movement in the late 1940s, as well as African American politicians such as Augustus Hawkins, who at that time was member of the California state legislature and one of the leading figures in the FEPC campaign.

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<sup>36</sup> George H. Dunne, "The Sin of Segregation," *Commonweal*, (Sept. 21, 1945), 542-545; George H. Dunne, "Socialism or socialism?" *Commonweal*, (November 23, 1945), 134-139.

At the same time, Dunne was part of a larger, institutional and transnational Catholic world as a Jesuit priest with significant previous experience as a missionary in China, where much of his reform-minded sensibilities were forged in the early 1930s. In addition, Dunne was closely linked with his fellow Jesuit, Father John LaFarge, the editor of the Catholic periodical, *America*, and founder of the national network of Catholic Interracial Councils who favored a more gradual approach to racial integration, as well as with fellow California Jesuits who worked alongside him on labor issues. Indeed, Dunne's status as a Jesuit priest and political activist in the early Cold War years would often lead him into conflict with a Church hierarchy that grew more militantly anti-communist during the period under the influence of bishops such as New York's Cardinal Spellman and his protégé, Cardinal James Francis McIntyre of Los Angeles.

When Dunne was a young Jesuit scholastic (as seminarians in the Society of Jesus are known) in the late-1920s, he volunteered for the China mission.<sup>37</sup> China had been missionary territory for the Jesuits and other Catholic religious orders since the sixteenth century, but the number of Christian missionaries in China, both Protestant and Catholic, was at an all-time high when Dunne arrived. The over 20,000 missionaries in Republican China constituted the largest foreign presence in the country, and they occupied important positions in schools and churches in major cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, as well as in the impoverished countryside.<sup>38</sup> European Jesuits, especially the French,

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<sup>37</sup> This account is largely adapted from George Dunne's autobiography, *King's Pawn: The Memoirs of George H. Dunne, S.J.* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 33ff.

<sup>38</sup> See Frank Dikotter, *The Age of Openness: China before Mao* (Berkeley: University of California press, 2008), 48.

had built up a robust network of Catholic institutions in a number of locations, but were increasingly in need of assistance as the number of Chinese Catholics steadily grew.

The California Province of the Jesuits, which had itself only ceased to be a missionary territory in 1909, agreed to send men to contribute to the China mission beginning in the late-1920s, and Dunne was one of the first to offer his services. He arrived in the French Concession of Shanghai in 1931 and set about learning Mandarin, teaching in the local Jesuit high school, and studying theology in preparation for his priestly ordination. However, Dunne's experience in China did more than enkindle his missionary zeal to save souls and convert the vast Chinese population to Catholicism. It also convinced him of the need for systematic social reform to prevent a Communist takeover of China.

Dunne witnessed firsthand the corruption of the Kuomintang government and the growing restiveness of the urban population that surrounded him in 1930s Shanghai. Although Mao's troops were at the time cordoned off in the south of China, Dunne interpreted the social unrest and poverty around him as ominous signs of the impending success of the Communist revolution. He wrote to his Jesuit superiors that unless China's Republican government instituted a host of critical reforms, China would fall into Communist hands by the 1960s at the latest. The dislocations of the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 significantly accelerated Dunne's timetable, and China was indeed in Communist hands by 1949.

Dunne's missionary experience in China was informed by a Catholic anticommunism that had been developing since the nineteenth century. Indeed, the

pronounced anticlericalism of left-wing revolutionary movements in Europe since the French Revolution had placed the Catholic Church in a defensive, even reactionary, posture for well over a century by the time Dunne arrived in Shanghai. Yet, the Catholic struggle against socialism and communism in Europe had a very different character than what Dunne had come to know in an Asian context. In Europe, the battle raged over the hearts and minds of the Catholic working class, whom the Church feared were rapidly exchanging their allegiance to priests and bishops for the radical possibilities of revolution. Much of the social teaching of the Catholic Church, which it began to promulgate in a serious way with Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1893, was an attempt to address the issue of labor from a pointedly anticommunist perspective, even as it acknowledged the dignity of labor and the rights of workers to organize into unions.<sup>39</sup>

Dunne's sojourn in China coincided with the next major development in Catholic social teaching, Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, written on the fortieth anniversary of Leo XIII's work. *Quadragesimo Anno* went much further than *Rerum Novarum* in providing a Catholic vision for government and the social contract, arguing essentially for a corporatist state, based on principles of subsidiarity, which would integrate the needs of labor, as well as management, into the body politic.<sup>40</sup> In

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<sup>39</sup> For a historical overview of Catholic social thought from a European perspective, see Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age, 1740-1958* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 230-288.

<sup>40</sup> Subsidiarity is the Catholic principle that social affairs should be handled at the lowest possible level of state that is adequate to the given issue. It is often improperly applied in a strictly devolutionary manner, but this is an impoverished understanding of the term. If an issue (the economy, for example) is judged to need international regulation because of its complexity, such regulation would be in keeping with

Europe, *Quadragesimo Anno* had an unforeseen influence on fascist political movements, which saw it as a comprehensive and potentially powerful antidote to the threat of communism.

However, the impact of Catholic social teaching was far different in the United States, where it lent renewed legitimacy to social reform efforts such as the 1919 Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction, written by Msgr. John Ryan, one of the leading figures of progressive Catholicism from the Progressive era through the New Deal. Ryan's signature contribution to American Catholic social thought was his insistence that the government provide a "living wage" to all workers, sufficient for a male breadwinner to support a family. Despite the deeply gendered character of such reforms, Ryan and the Bishops' Plan represented a remarkably progressive vision for American society that was less overtly concerned with the specter of communism than its European counterparts.<sup>41</sup>

Dunne carried this distinctively American version of Catholic social reform with him to China, where he realized the international dimensions of the problems of labor and capital. Understandably, however, his primary concern was safeguarding the integrity of the Jesuit missionary project in China, which had stretched back several centuries to the time of great European missionaries such as Matteo Ricci and Ferdinand Verbiest during

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subsidiarity. See Patrick McKinley Brennan, "Subsidiarity in Catholic Social Theory" in *Global Perspectives on Subsidiarity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 29-47.

<sup>41</sup> See Harlan Beckley, *Passion for Justice: Retrieving the Legacies of Walter Rauschenbusch, John A. Ryan, and Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 110-159.

the Qing Dynasty.<sup>42</sup> Dunne knew that a victory by Mao's People's Army would potentially have a devastating effect on the network of schools and churches that the Jesuits had constructed in hopes of converting China's massive population to Catholicism. Moreover, it would mean an end to the Catholic social vision in that country that was gaining at least some traction in Europe and the United States as the devastation of the Great Depression took hold.

When Dunne was forced to leave China because of health concerns shortly before his ordination to the priesthood, he did so with great regret. An academic center that he was helping to establish, which would have brought Jesuit scholars from around the world to study and live in China, was having difficulty getting off the ground, and Dunne despaired of its ultimate success. Nevertheless, Dunne's confrontation with the transnational dimensions of the need for social reform and a robust Catholic response to social inequality stayed with him through the remainder of his Jesuit formation, and it would color his future engagement with the issues of race and labor in Los Angeles and beyond after the war.

Dunne's time in China also reveals an overlooked dimension of progressive Catholic thought and practice in the United States—its inherent transnationalism. Much has been written about “home-grown” twentieth-century progressive Catholics such as Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, both of whom were contemporaries of Dunne. Historian James Fisher has written of these Catholics as part of a distinctly American Catholic counterculture that defined itself partly in opposition to both mainstream

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<sup>42</sup> One of the best accounts of these missionaries is George Dunne's own *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

American culture and the conservative hierarchy of the Church (although Day in particular was generally a supporter of the hierarchy).<sup>43</sup> Day's Catholic Worker movement, for example, is most often interpreted as an outgrowth of an American radical tradition to which Day added a personalist philosophy and Catholic doctrine to forge an incisive, activist critique of capitalism and dominant American values such as consumerism. Even as Day launched her assault on American materialism and excess, however, she embodied deeper American currents of utopianism, communitarianism, and a bohemian subculture.<sup>44</sup>

While undoubtedly true, these portrayals leave out important American Catholic actors, particularly members of international religious orders, who had direct experience of nations and contexts beyond American borders and who occupied critical leadership positions within the U.S. Catholic Church. For Dunne, this experience would not only shape his intellectual outlook, but also deeply informed his engagement with American politics, especially as the Cold War began to unfold.

After his return to the United States, Dunne continued to keep international politics in focus as he began doctoral studies at the University of Chicago in political science, specializing in Sovietology. Dunne was part of a growing cadre of Catholic clergy that were beginning to be educated in secular universities by the mid-twentieth century, breaking free of the constraints of Catholic seminary education, even if they were slated to return to Catholic universities to teach, as Dunne was. Dunne's first

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<sup>43</sup> See James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America: 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 25-93.

<sup>44</sup> Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 134-143.



assignment after receiving his doctorate in the mid-1940s was to teach political science at St. Louis University, but his progressive politics soon brought him into conflict with other Jesuits in the university administration as well as the archbishop of St. Louis, John Glennon. The issue, however, was not over his interest in the Soviet Union, but over his stand on race.<sup>45</sup>

While in St. Louis, Dunne joined a group of progressive Jesuits and like-minded lay persons to push for the integration of the city's Catholic schools, much to the displeasure of the segregationist Glennon. Although St. Louis University itself had quietly begun admitting black students just before the end of the war, the archbishop's racial views made for an exceedingly delicate political situation for the Jesuit administrators. Dunne, who apparently could never be accused of subtlety, began broadcasting radio homilies in which he attacked segregation as inimical to the Gospel, and the archdiocese's continued policy of school segregation as inherently unjust.<sup>46</sup> As Dunne argued, a Catholic school "is a *Catholic* institution and therefore under strict obligation to conform to Catholic principles," and therefore cannot "profess a doctrine which is branded as false by science, forbidden by the inspired word of God, condemned by the Vicar of Christ, and which, by denying that the Negro *as a human person* is fully equal to every other *human person*, violates a fundamental principle of justice."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Dunne, *King's Pawn: The Memoirs of George H. Dunne, S.J.* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 75ff.

<sup>46</sup> Dunne, *King's Pawn*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> George H. Dunne, "The Sin of Segregation," *Commonweal*, (Sept. 21, 1945), 544, 543.

After several more incidents in which Dunne forcefully argued for the immediate desegregation of Catholic institutions in St. Louis, Dunne was dismissed from the university by its president, Father Patrick Holloran. His fractious time in St. Louis over racial issues subsequently inspired Dunne to forge an intellectual and moral foundation for interracial politics that set him apart even from racial liberals such as the Jesuit Father John LaFarge, founder of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York and patron of its nationwide network.

After leaving St. Louis, Dunne's Jesuit superiors reassigned him to Loyola University of Los Angeles, a move that would bring him into the center of political conflicts over race and labor in the early postwar years. While he was transitioning to his new post, Dunne wrote two influential articles for the liberal Catholic periodical, *Commonweal*, in which he staked out a position well to the left of most Catholics on racial integration and the prospects of Catholic cooperation with socialists. Taken together, these articles reveal not only Dunne's progressive credentials, but also the variety of Catholic political discourse available in 1945, before the hardening of lines during the McCarthy era and a more strident brand of Catholic anticommunism came to the fore.

In "The Sin of Segregation," Dunne, with the bitter aftertaste of his time in St. Louis still very much in evidence, wrote that "the racist mind has contrived an almost limitless number of evasive analogies to justify the unjustifiable," perhaps obliquely referring to Archbishop Glennon and other segregationist Catholics.<sup>48</sup> He went on to

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<sup>48</sup> George H. Dunne, "The Sin of Segregation," *Commonweal*, (Sept. 21, 1945), 542-545.

dismantle spurious claims about the ill-effects of miscegenation, which he claimed owed more to the fascist thought of the Nazis than to believing Christians. Dunne's rationale was, admittedly, more philosophical than political. It was based on a vision of justice and natural rights that were normative in Catholic thought, even if Dunne was applying these ancient principles in new and controversial ways. Moreover, his starting place, as was true of most racial liberals of the time, was the individual's conscience and the ways in which racism conflicted with an individual's right to choose their own acquaintances and friends. However, Dunne quickly moved beyond this liberal focus on individualism to pose a more socially-grounded set of objections to segregation.

Dunne continued his assault on racial exclusion by calling for an end to restrictive covenants and noting that white concerns over property values based on the alleged moral inferiority of racial minorities was an instance of utter hypocrisy, as many of these same already invited blacks into their homes as domestic servants. Dunne also added another call for the immediate desegregation of all Catholic institutions, extending a line of argument that he had used in his controversial radio homilies in St. Louis.

Yet, Dunne saved his most devastating critique of segregation, at least for any faithful Catholic, for the end of his long article in *Commonweal*. Dunne concluded that segregation was not only an illogical and unjust practice, but that it was a sin against charity itself. Although this might seem like a commonplace and uncontroversial statement in our post-civil rights era, it was far from that in the Catholic world of 1945. As historians such as John McGreevy have argued, the encounter with race was one of the most fractious issues to confront the U.S. Church throughout the twentieth century.

Most American Catholics, particularly those in urban neighborhoods in the Northeast and Midwest, lived in an almost entirely Catholic world, with a dense network of social institutions, schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations that structured Catholic life.<sup>49</sup> The most important institution in this Catholic world was the geographical parish, which not only organized social and spiritual life, but also sacralized Catholic neighborhoods, making them particularly defensive about encroachments by racial outsiders, especially non-Catholic African Americans. It would only be in the 1960s that the Church began to use its institutional weight to fully desegregate Catholic institutions, but even then, these efforts were often met by massive resistance on the part of the working class Catholics in the pews.

Nevertheless, Dunne was not completely alone in his calls for greater racial inclusion in the Catholic community. John LaFarge worked for greater racial tolerance among Catholics through his many Catholic Interracial Councils, as well as through his editorship of the national Jesuit magazine, *America*. However, as historians have noted, there were clear limits to LaFarge's interracial politics, as he generally favored a gradual approach that would not alienate traditional Catholics and other conservatives among the faithful.<sup>50</sup> He was especially cautious on issues of interracial marriage, fearing that the offspring of such marriages would inevitably be subject to harassment and discrimination in the racist American culture.

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<sup>49</sup> See John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43-53.

<sup>50</sup> See David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911-1963* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1996), 261-276.

Dunne, along with his friend Dan Marshall, the Los Angeles-based lawyer who had founded the short-lived Catholic Interracial Council of Los Angeles, were far more aggressive in their calls for racial equality and the immediate integration of Catholic institutions that set them apart from their East Coast counterparts. Marshall was especially concerned with LaFarge's gradualism with respect to interracial marriage, seeing in it a potentially dangerous justification for continuing racial intolerance.

In fact, Marshall, along with Dunne's support, petitioned the California Supreme Court in a landmark 1948 case, *Perez v. Sharp*, to overturn statewide restrictions on interracial marriage.<sup>51</sup> Andrea Perez was a Mexican American woman who wished to be married to Sylvester Davis, an African American man, which was prohibited under California state law because Mexicans at the time were considered to be white. Both Perez and Davis were Catholics and parishioners at Marshall's multiracial church, St. Patrick's in South Central Los Angeles. Marshall's argument before the court was not based solely on his legal convictions regarding the injustice of racial discrimination. Rather, he made *Perez v. Sharp* into a First Amendment case, arguing that the couple's religious freedom was being violated by the state by its not allowing them to participate in the sacrament of marriage.

Marshall won the case in a 5-4 decision, but was disturbed by the dissenting opinion of one of the judges that cited LaFarge's writings in the 1944 book, *The Race*

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<sup>51</sup> This case, and Marshall's role in it, has recently received a good deal of scholarly attention. See Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42-43; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 205-216; and Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11-50.

*Question and the Negro*, as a rationale for the continued ban on interracial marriage.

Marshall quickly fired off a letter to Lafarge, warning him about the ways that his moderate stance on racial issues was being appropriated by segregationists to uphold unjust legislation, and only thinly veiling his anger over LaFarge's go-slow approach to integration.<sup>52</sup>

Dunne, on the other hand, was no gradualist on racial issues and shared Marshall's concerns over LaFarge's policies. But Dunne also had an even larger, more global political project in mind in the immediate postwar years as the world reconfigured itself in the aftermath of the Allied victory. In another article published within a few months of "The Sin of Segregation," Dunne outlined the possibilities for Catholics and democratic socialists to work together to secure a more just social order—the one that he had first recognized the need for in his China days.

In "Socialism or socialism?" which appeared in the pages of *Commonweal* in November of 1945, Dunne surveyed the postwar political landscape in Europe and was deeply disturbed by the ways in which the forces of unbridled capitalism were already working to assert control. He wrote, "It is difficult to understand how anyone could have imagined that with the day of liberation there would come pouring out...an army of capitalists bent upon restoring the old order of things that had preceded conquest." Dunne lamented that the solidarities forged in the dark days of the war were already disaggregating in the few short months since the defeat of Nazism, and that financiers

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<sup>52</sup> Dan Marshall, letter to John Lafarge, S.J., dated 10/4/1948, Papers of John LaFarge, S.J., Box 29, Folder 13, Georgetown University Archives.

and industrialists, who had done little to earn the victory, were moving swiftly to dictate the terms of the peace.<sup>53</sup>

Dunne's proposed solution to the problems confronting postwar Europe involved the cooperation of Christian Democrats and Socialists to work together to create a more just and equitable social, economic, and political order. Doing so, he argued, required that Catholics learn to distinguish between the materialist philosophy of Socialism, which it must reject, and its program for economic restructuring and redistribution of goods, which it ought to embrace wholeheartedly as representative of Gospel values. In a similar manner, Dunne maintained that Socialists should give up their historical opposition to the Catholic Church as a bastion of reactionary social and political thought.

Dunne's call for cooperation between left-wing political groups and Christian Democratic parties was undoubtedly rooted in the distinctive brand of anticommunism that he had begun to develop as a China missionary in the 1930s. However, Dunne's anticommunism had significant room in it for endorsing an economic plan with strongly socialist components, even to the point of significantly redistributing wealth and curtailing the influence of capitalists. This political vision during the earliest years of the Cold War put him at odds with other American Catholics, who greeted the postwar years with increasing trepidation over the expansion of Soviet influence.

Taken together, Dunne's two remarkable articles from 1945 represent his attempt to forge an intellectual and moral argument not only about race, but about the postwar future of the United States and the world based on principles of equity, social justice, and

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<sup>53</sup> George H. Dunne, "Socialism or socialism?" *Commonweal*, (November 23, 1945), 134-139.

increasing cooperation between the left and the Catholic Church. Soon, however, Dunne's ruminations on the pages of *Commonweal* would come vividly, and tragically, to life as he confronted the cauldron of race, labor, and politics in Los Angeles.

The Cold War was not only waged in on the plane of geopolitics and national political concerns—it was also fought locally, often in battles over the color line, labor, and, in this case, religion. Viewing Cold War politics “from the bottom up” reveals the often violent set of contests that played out in American cities and other locations over the meanings and directions of life in the postwar period.<sup>54</sup>

Los Angeles was one of the key places where these battles were fought in the mid-to-late-1940s. The city's multiracial demographic, which made its color line far more protean than it was in Northeastern or Midwestern cities, also made it a primary place where the struggle against racial exclusion, restrictive covenants, and workplace discrimination took on the most urgency.<sup>55</sup> For Dunne, two crucial events critically shaped his understanding and engagement with local Cold War politics—the aforementioned Short case and the Hollywood strikes that began in 1945. Together, these incidents brought Dunne closer to the positions of a remarkable group of progressive activists, including members of the NAACP and the Los Angeles CIO, that

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<sup>54</sup> This approach is suggested by the articles in the recent collection, Shelton Stromquist, ed., *Labor's Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008). See especially Kenneth Burt's contribution, “The Fight for Fair Employment and the Shifting Alliances among Latinos and Labor in Cold War Los Angeles,” 79-109.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 232-258.



historian Shana Bernstein has called “bridges of reform.”<sup>56</sup> Perhaps inevitably, they also brought Dunne into conflict within both the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the increasingly conservative political world of postwar southern California.

As historian Josh Sides has argued, in many ways, Los Angeles was a city of real opportunity for African Americans in the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Like many industrial cities, Los Angeles had attracted many blacks during both phases of the Great Migration, and the burgeoning metropolis provided ample job opportunities, even if they tended to be, as in most cities, at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. African Americans had slowly broken out from the Central Avenue corridor near downtown into several surrounding neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles, a vast area that would become synonymous with the black Angelenos in the ensuing decades. Yet, many Los Angeles neighborhoods and suburbs remained closed to blacks, either through the use of restrictive covenants or more subtle forms of housing discrimination. In some cases, however, as in Fontana in December of 1945, racial exclusion took a violent turn.

After learning of the tragic events in Fontana, Dunne hastily wrote an article that appeared in March of 1946 in *Commonweal*. Entitled simply, “The Short Case,” Dunne recounted the visit by Mrs. Short’s sister to a meeting of the Los Angeles Catholic Interracial Council in which it was resolved to press the San Bernardino District Attorney’s office to reopen its investigation of the fatal fire that claimed the lives of the

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<sup>56</sup> Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138-184.

<sup>57</sup> Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 57-94.

Short family.<sup>58</sup> Dunne fused biblical language with calls for social justice and restitution, writing that “there are no restrictive covenants in Jerusalem the holy city,” and went on to attack the arbiters of “bourgeois morality” for turning a blind eye to racial injustice and even murder. Dunne was also clearly frustrated by the fact that any attempts to address issues race in Los Angeles were invariably met with suspicions of Communist influence. With the bitterest irony he also wrote that what Paradise needed, according to some, was “a Hearst newspaper and an American Legion.” For Dunne, the Short family was not only a victim of racist vigilantes, but of the hypocrisy and facile politics of Los Angeles’ conservative middle class, who made a mockery of both religious and political calls for justice.

After writing a follow-up article on the Short case for *Commonweal*, Dunne set about writing a stage play based on transcripts of the coroner’s inquest that he and Dan Marshall had obtained, after much resistance, from the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department.<sup>59</sup> He had been encouraged to write a play by his friend, Sister Marie de Lourdes, mother superior at nearby Mount St. Mary’s College and a teacher of theater arts. She was convinced that not only would the story of the Short tragedy make great theater, it would also be a way of publicizing the Short case beyond the limited readership of *Commonweal*.<sup>60</sup> Dunne agreed, rapidly writing what would be his first and only play, *Trial by Fire*, which premiered at the Wilshire Ebell Theater in Los Angeles in

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<sup>58</sup> George H. Dunne, “The Short Case,” *Commonweal*, (March 1, 1946), 494-497.

<sup>59</sup> The follow-up article is George H. Dunne, “No Accident!” *Commonweal*, (May 24, 1946), 134-138.

<sup>60</sup> See Dunne, *King’s Pawn: The Memoirs of George H. Dunne, S.J.* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 132ff.

late-1946. In the next several years, it played before audiences in cities from New York to Chicago, receiving positive notices and even the occasional rave review (from no less an august figure than Langston Hughes) for its gutsy and emotional portrayal of racial violence and the nobility of the Short family's stand against restrictive covenants.<sup>61</sup>

During *Trial by Fire*'s initial run in 1946, Dunne and the actors used the play as a means of political mobilization in support of Proposition 11, which appeared on California's ballots in 1946. Prop 11 would have permanently established a Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) in California, institutionalizing the expiring national FEPC put in place during the war by FDR. The campaign for the passage of Prop 11 was itself a microcosm of the collision of Cold War politics and religion, as the Catholic Archbishop Cantwell came out strongly in favor, while Rev. James Fifiield, the conservative head of the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, and a leading figure in anti-New Deal political activism, opposed the measure with equal fervor. Prop 11 was defeated in 1946, caught in the middle of a widening political and religious chasm in the early Cold War.

In June of 1947, *Ebony* magazine ran a feature article on both Dunne and *Trial by Fire*. The article noted the "smear campaign" that Dunne and his play had been subjected to by some Catholics, who called him "a tool of the Communists subverting the American way of life." Moreover, the article noted the unusual intellectual position Dunne occupied regarding Catholic anticommunism, arguing that "[Dunne's] insistence that Catholics should devote their lung-power to being outspoken on American sore spots

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<sup>61</sup> Langston Hughes, "Trial by Fire," *Chicago Defender*, (May 22, 1948), 14.

instead of upbraiding outspoken Communists, plus his alienation of reactionaries in general, are working against him.”<sup>62</sup>

As Dunne’s play worked its way across the country, it was often produced under the auspices of civil rights organizations such as Chicago’s Civil Rights Congress, which included many members of the CPUSA. It was apparently at this time that the FBI began compiling a file on Dunne, deeming his activities potentially un-American and far too close to Communists for their liking. As the Cold War grew colder in the late-1940s, it became increasingly difficult for Dunne to speak out openly on issues of racial justice without coming into conflict with authorities, just as *Ebony* magazine predicted.<sup>63</sup>

However, *Trial by Fire* was not the sole cause of Dunne’s travails during the early years of the Cold War. He also became deeply embroiled in the Hollywood strikes that began in 1945 and continued through 1946 and 1947, when the upstart Conference of Studio Unions began a strike against both the studios and the rival International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) which by that time had strong ties to organized crime. It would be a long and bloody strike, devolving several times into violent episodes, and constituting a crucial part of the 1946 strike wave, the largest in American history.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “Trial by Fire: Priest Writes Play to Wage War Against the Sin of Racism,” *Ebony*, (June 1, 1947), 31-35.

<sup>63</sup> See Steven Rosswurm, *The FBI and the Catholic Church, 1935-1962* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 123ff.

<sup>64</sup> See Gerald Horne, *Class Struggle in Hollywood, 1930-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001) for a book-length account of the strikes, including Dunne’s role, especially 153-190.

Dunne became a kind of unofficial chaplain to the CSU strikers, appearing at rallies to assure them that justice was on their side and to continue fighting against the studios and IATSE, and providing them, along with Dan Marshall, with strategic and legal advice. Accusations of Dunne's sympathies with Communists once again circulated widely, provoking the ire of the then-Archbishop of Los Angeles, John Cantwell, who was committed to seeking a peaceful and quick resolution to the strike and undermining Communist influence in Hollywood. However, Dunne's critics were not limited to the Catholic hierarchy. When Dunne suggested that the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) join in a sympathy strike on behalf of the CSU, he was vehemently rebuffed in a face-to-face meeting by the union's president, Ronald Reagan, who was convinced that the Hollywood strikes were the leading edge of a Communist conspiracy to subvert the United States government.<sup>65</sup>

In August of 1947, Dunne was called to testify before the House Committee on Education and Labor, in order to clarify his role in the labor unrest that had engulfed Hollywood since the end of the war. Although cleared of any wrongdoing or Communist activities, the Jesuits soon reassigned Dunne out of Los Angeles to Phoenix, largely owing to the controversy surrounding his pro-labor politics. It was the beginning of a great deal of change in Los Angeles, as the grip of the more militant strand of Catholic anticommunism began to gather strength as the 1940s drew to a close.

In 1948, Joseph Cantwell retired as Archbishop of Los Angeles and was replaced by James Francis McIntyre, who had served as Cardinal Spellman's chancellor in New

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<sup>65</sup> Dunne, *King's Pawn: The Memoirs of George H. Dunne, S.J.* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 152-157. For more on Reagan's opposition to the strike, see H.W. Brands, *Reagan: The Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2015) pp. 66-78.

York. McIntyre was deeply conservative, both theologically and politically, and committed to the stridently anticommunist politics of his mentor. One of McIntyre's first acts as archbishop was to officially dissolve the Catholic Interracial Council (CIC-LA), a move that has been widely interpreted to reveal the new archbishop's insensitivity to racial issues. However, even in this instance, issues of race, labor, and politics collide. In 1946, the CIC-LA had given their annual award to Los Angeles CIO chief Slim Connelly, a noted Communist and dedicated Catholic who had done much to organize L.A.'s growing industrial labor force throughout the 1940s. The move had infuriated many in the archdiocese, including Father Tom McCarthy, the editor of the archdiocesan newspaper, *The Tidings*. McCarthy wrote an angry letter to LaFarge in New York denouncing the CIC-LA's recognition of such a controversial figure who could be found, McCarthy noted "at many questionable meetings around the city." Undoubtedly, McIntyre took McCarthy's concerns into account when he dissolved the CIC-LA, another victim of the early Cold War.<sup>66</sup>

In exile in Phoenix, Dunne worked in the local Jesuit parish, waiting for his opportunity to reconnect with the political scene in Los Angeles. In 1949, he was inspired to write a response to Paul Blanshard's book, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, which indicted the Catholic Church as inherently un-American, anti-democratic and authoritarian—charges that carried particular gravity as the United States struggled for global dominance against the Soviet Union. Blanshard's book was a best-seller, and reignited the long-running debate in American history over the ability of the Catholic

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<sup>66</sup> Based on a letter from Rev. Thomas J. McCarthy to John LaFarge, S.J., dated 8/28/1946, in Papers of John LaFarge, S.J., Box 29, Folder 13, Georgetown University Archives.

Church to embrace democratic values, even as it revived the equally venerable tradition of American anti-Catholicism.<sup>67</sup>

In 1950, Harvard Law School invited Blanshard and Dunne to Cambridge to debate their respective positions at a public forum. In the political funhouse that was the early Cold War, the liberal Blanshard in many ways stood to the political right of Dunne on any number of issues. Yet, it was Dunne who was called upon to defend his commitment to democracy. During the debate, Blanshard recapitulated the major arguments from his book, citing undue Catholic influence in everything from medicine to education that did not admit of democratic participation. In particular, Blanshard singled out Catholic opposition to birth control and the liberalization of divorce laws, as well as the Catholic hierarchy's penchant for censorship.<sup>68</sup> It was a familiar litany that might have been heard, with slightly different particulars, in the nineteenth century as well as the mid-twentieth.

Despite his own struggles with the Catholic hierarchy, Dunne responded as a forthright Catholic apologist, demonstrating both his doctorate in political science and his extensive philosophical training by parsing Blanshard's statements like a latter-day scholastic theologian. He defended in particular Catholic political action through the National Catholic Welfare Conference, as well as traditional Catholic conceptions of the relationship of church and state. Moreover, Dunne also argued that Blanshard had made the mistake of conflating the moral and the political. For Catholics, Dunne claimed,

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, (Boston: Beacon Press), 1949. John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*, (New York: Norton), 2003.

<sup>68</sup> The transcript of the forum has been preserved as a short book, *The Catholic Church and Politics: A Transcript of a Discussion of a Vital Issue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Law School Forum, Inc., 1950).

some things are simply right or wrong, beyond the wrangling of politics. Perhaps, in the end, Dunne's progressive politics of the 1940s were ultimately more about his burning sense of justice and morality than they were about a political platform. The issues he chose to focus on—from the Short case to the CSU strike—strongly suggest this was the case.

In his response to Blanshard, Dunne was once again the missionary, proclaiming the faith to an often indifferent audience, as laughter occasionally greeted his serious responses on that night in Cambridge in 1950. The moment strikingly captures, however, a Catholic politics of the Cold War very much in flux. Ultimately, Dunne was far from what would later be known as a “liberal” Catholic during the great transformations unleashed in the Catholic Church by the Second Vatican Council. Instead, he was a rather traditional figure, who tried to forge a different path through the thickets of Cold War politics from that of many of his contemporaries in the Church. Dunne's vision of racial justice, labor activism, and a more capacious anticommunism would not come to define the mainstream of Catholic Cold War politics as did the darker visions of Spellman, McIntyre, and McCarthy. Nevertheless, Dunne's activism was far from inconsequential, and would have at least an implicit impact on Catholic social activism in California, such as its support of the UFW and immigration rights, for many years to come.



### **Ecumenical Protestants and Race in Los Angeles**

In 1957, the Los Angeles Council of Churches completed a momentous meeting. Already known as one of the most inclusive local church councils in the nation, the group expanded to include the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, the AME Zion Church, and the local branch of the Greek Orthodox Church.<sup>69</sup> In addition to broadening its membership, the Council adopted a set of legislative and social priorities that each member church would work to promote at the state and local levels. These included rather typical moral concerns such as the regulation of alcohol and gambling, but also broader concerns in the economic and political spheres. These included the abolition of the death penalty and opposition to “right to work” laws.

The adoption of a legislative agenda by the Los Angeles Council of Churches was part of a larger networking of the social policy of Protestant churches and broadly reflected the priorities of the national body, the National Council of Churches. In 1956, Eugene Carson Blake, a Presbyterian minister from Philadelphia who served as the head of the NCC declared that one of the Council’s primary goals was to “be the conscience of this nation.”

Internally, however, the NCC was often beset by divisions. Historian Jill Gill has detailed the ways in which the NCC’s growing anti-war stance in the 1960s embroiled its leadership in great controversy.<sup>70</sup> Less well-known, however, is that the 1950s emphasis

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<sup>69</sup> Dan L. Thrapp, "Church Council Has Busy Session," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 26, 1957, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/167027248?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>70</sup> See Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 137-198.

on civil rights also met with fierce discontent on the part of many member churches, especially when the NCC challenged its members over their complicity in racial injustice.

Race relations were of paramount religious importance to a multitude of churches, synagogues, and other religious social institutions in the postwar period, even if this did not necessarily translate into broad-based activism on the part of ordinary church-goers.

Tri-faith America, as historian Kevin Schultz has called it, was a Cold War political project, as much civic as it was religious.<sup>71</sup> Schultz notes that, in a sense, the model represented the end of the notion of the American melting pot, as Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were expected to maintain distinct and separate identities, forming a tripartite religious establishment. On the level of civic engagement, however, the example of cities such as Los Angeles belie this model of perpetually separate religious identities. Indeed, not only the political pressures of the Cold War era, but also the theological and social reflections of religious bodies themselves encouraged the blurring of strict denominational identities.

Mainline Protestant attempts to integrate their own churches met with much of the same mix of success and resistance as their efforts to advocate for civil rights for blacks more generally. In 1956, the Church Federation of Los Angeles sponsored a two-day study in which the possibility of church integration was broached with all-white congregations. Run under the leadership of *Christian Century* editor Harold Fey, the study was designed to test the limits of white mainline acceptance of blacks as fellow congregants, not merely abstractly as fellow human beings. Fey envisioned the project in

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<sup>71</sup> See especially the introduction to *Tri-Faith America* (see note 3, above).

religious terms, asking “can segregation survive in the church? Of course...To solve the problem will take more than the social welfare push of do-gooding. It will take a new commitment to the Kingdom of God in order to obtain the Will of God.”<sup>72</sup> At the time, only a handful of the member churches in Los Angeles were integrated, but opponents of greater integration were not concerned, mainly because the all-white churches tended to be in all-white, heavily segregated neighborhoods.

In 1957, the liberal Protestant commitment to church integration was put to the test, with decidedly mixed results. Dr. Ray Ragsdale, head of the Southern California branch of the United Methodist Church, appointed Rev. N. Burlin Huggins as the first black pastor of an all-white church in Los Angeles, the Normandie Avenue Methodist Church. Immediately, the entire white membership of the church, 43 in total, quit in protest, prompting a resigned Huggins to state, “my appointment thus becomes an even greater challenge to rebuild God’s house on the ruins of neglect.”<sup>73</sup>

Despite this inauspicious beginning, Huggins and the Normandie Avenue Church soon attracted, albeit temporarily, a vast congregation of racially-liberal Protestants. At Huggins’ first official service as pastor, over 1,000 congregants gathered to celebrate his arrival, with many noting that the surrounding neighborhood was becoming increasingly “Negro.” In his sermon, Huggins put the task set before him and the church in Christian terms, comparing their situation to that of St. Paul in Corinth: “This morning,” he

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<sup>72</sup> Dan L. Thrapp, "Desegregation In Churches Studied," *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File): 12. Nov 24 1956. *ProQuest*. Web. 4 Feb. 2015 .

<sup>73</sup> "New Negro Pastor Seeks Worshipers as White Congregation Quits in Protest." 1957. *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Jul 02, 12. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/114201769?accountid=7418>.

preached, “you are here to defy the forces of hell, and I say to you that through contact with God, we can meet its challenge!”<sup>74</sup>

The problems facing liberal Protestant congregations were indeed vast in the 1950s, largely owing to the rapid suburbanization of the churches that drew the concern of many ecumenical Protestant thinkers, most notably Gibson Winter, who in a widely-read book from 1961 decried the “suburban captivity of the churches.”<sup>75</sup> Even before Winter’s seminal work, however, a multitude of ecumenical Protestant thinkers engaged the problem of urban ministry and changing neighborhoods, often from perspectives at once social scientific and pastoral. In Los Angeles, currents of the Social Gospel had long been a presence in the city, largely thanks to the efforts of G. Bromley Oxnam and his Church of All Nations, founded in 1920s.<sup>76</sup>

In fact, in 1955, the church’s social service organization, the All Nations Foundation, had been named by the National Council of Churches (NCC) as the nation’s premier social service provider, with a range of initiatives for impoverished youth that were explicitly multiracial.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the racial crosscurrents in evidence in the attempts to integrate the Normandie Avenue Church speak to the tenuous nature of

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<sup>74</sup> "1000 Flock to Launch New Interracial Church." 1957. *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jul 08, 4. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/167167840?accountid=7418>.

<sup>75</sup> Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961).

<sup>76</sup> See Tom Sitton, and William Deverell. *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley: U of California, 2001), 7-25.

<sup>77</sup> "All Nations Church and Foundation Win Citation." 1955. *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 19, 20. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/166836701?accountid=7418>.

ecumenical Protestantism's effort to put its postwar social policies into practice, especially regarding race.

Of course, the Christian churches most directly involved with issues of race were African American congregations that faced head on the legacy of Jim Crow, even in Los Angeles.<sup>78</sup> In 1958, journalist Chester L. Washington, writing in the black newspaper, *Pittsburgh Courier*, praised the efforts of Second Baptist Church pastor J. Raymond Henderson and others to use church funds to support the NAACP and the Urban League, seeking to advance the civil rights agenda so central to black churches across the country at the time. But it would be a new generation of African American pastors, such as Thomas Kilgore and H.H. Brookins, who took on their flocks in Los Angeles in the early-1960s that would be on the forefront not only of the civil rights agenda, but of the political life of Los Angeles and the continued evolution of social Christianity in the city. Their stories form part of the next chapter.

Social Christianity's postwar trajectory in Los Angeles traveled through the faultlines of Cold War America's confrontation with race, labor, and the proper role of religion in public life. It was not an easy road, as resistance to integration and civil rights were more the norm than the rule, despite official pronouncements and the efforts of church activists to the contrary. Nevertheless, social Christianity was remade in the postwar years, with an ambitious, if constrained, agenda of social change that continued into the 1960s. Race would remain at the heart of the project, but cities themselves

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<sup>78</sup> See Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: U of California, 2005), 331-364.

would become an even greater focus, nowhere more so than in Los Angeles, where the trials by fire of the churches, and the city, would continue.

## Chapter 2

### **Prophets of the Secular City: The Churches and the Urban Crisis in 1960s Los Angeles**

On August 27, 1965, an emergency meeting of the Disciples of Christ's (DOC) Department of Christian Action and Community Service was held in Los Angeles in the immediate aftermath of the civil violence that had swept through the Watts neighborhood just two weeks prior. Addressing the gathered assembly was Rev. Curt Moody, a DOC minister who also headed up the Community Relations Conference of Southern California, who forcefully argued that a "sense of isolation" pervaded black congregations of the church, an isolation that was at least partially to blame for the violence. Moody went on to recommend that the various, largely white DOC congregations in Los Angeles invite black DOC congregants from Watts and South Central L.A. to speak, so that they could "report the harassment they have suffered over the years." In this way, Moody hoped, the distance, both moral and spatial, between whites and blacks could begin to be bridged.<sup>79</sup>

Moody's proposed solution to the racial upheaval of Watts was worthy of Gunnar Myrdal and other liberals of the period, religious and otherwise, that framed the issues of race and the growing urban crisis in terms of morality. If only whites would educate

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<sup>79</sup> This account is adapted from Edwin C. Linberg, *The Disciples in the Pacific Southwest Region* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse Books, 2009), 115ff.

themselves on the plight of blacks, the color line, and its attendant injustices, would disappear.

However, Moody's approach was not the only one available to religious actors at the time. Also appearing before the DOC's 1965 meeting was Rev. Wesley Ford, who was serving as the pastor of the First Christian Church of Pasadena and a member of the Southern California Council of Churches' Civil Rights Committee. Ford's diagnosis of the violence in Watts was far more structural than Moody's, reflecting a strain of religious thought on the race issue that went beyond moral bromides. "Laypeople need to become concerned as citizens and church members because church people generally believe that the problem is political," Ford argued. He continued to delineate what he considered the actual roots of the crisis in Watts, namely, that the segregation of the city's churches reflected the larger reality of segregated housing. Two African American members of Ford's committee, Lorenz Graham and Henry Williams, reiterated the pastor's points, adding that "discriminatory school practices, police surveillance, and other practices of community institutions produc[ed] a negative effect in the lives of minority groups, especially blacks."<sup>80</sup>

To address these issues, Ford and the rest of the Council of Churches' Civil Rights Division proposed a series of concrete steps that the organization and their coreligionists might take. Among these were increased funding for community organizing and initiating action against the Los Angeles Board of Education in protest of the substandard schooling in minority neighborhoods. Not long after this initial

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 116.



gathering, the organization made more long-term, substantive proposals, including the establishment of various task forces on issues ranging from fair housing to the reform of police procedures.

As with much religious activism around issues of race and civil rights (as well as Vietnam-era antiwar activities) in the postwar years, the efforts of the clergy and other religious elites to engage broader constituencies, especially middle class, white churchgoers, were often met with indifference or outright resistance. Moreover, this gap was thoroughly ecumenical, affecting Catholics as well as mainline Protestants in equal measure, as many commentators, then and now, have observed.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, the social thought and policies of the institutional churches and the relatively small group of clergy and other committed activists that carried it out had a marked impact on the fate of postwar cities such as Los Angeles, especially as those cities entered the years of urban crisis in the 1960s.

But what Ford's diagnosis of the problems of Watts revealed was not only a pragmatic and insightful mind at work on the problem of race, jobs, and cities, but also a turn in theological reflection itself, one that took the churches' role in directly confronting social problems in a spirit of experimentation and even societal transformation. For many Christian activists of this period, it was a time in which the problems and potential of "the secular city" were in the theological atmosphere, and the

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<sup>81</sup> The abiding sense that more "liberal" clergy in the mainstream churches, Protestant and Catholic, in the civil rights era were increasingly at odds with rank-and-file congregants was current at the time and borne out by subsequent historiography. See Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches, and the Prospect for Their Renewal to Serve the Whole Life of the Emerging Metropolis* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), and John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155-208; David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18-55.

urban crisis itself became a kind of laboratory to work out new solutions of both evangelism and social witness.

This chapter outlines the ways in which this mainstream Christian social thought, which focused in ways explicit and implicit on the problem of cities, impacted Los Angeles in the 1960s in three major ways. After a brief survey of Christian social thought in the period, it first looks to the campaign against Proposition 14 on the part of churches and religious organizations, which reveals the ways in which social Christianity's project of racial liberalism was resisted and opposed, often from within its own ranks. Second, it looks briefly at the responses of the mainstream churches to the Watts Riot as a window onto the multiplicity of ways that churches sought to implement their teachings on cities, race, and human community more generally. Lastly, it examines the ambitious Los Angeles Goals project of the late-1960s, in which city planners attempted to "bring the church to the people" by instilling Christian notions of citizen participation into the master plan of the city. Taken together, these events reveal postwar social Christianity as a movement both coming together and pulling apart. It was coming together across denominational lines through its commitments, especially, to racial justice and urban ministry in a time of crisis. But it was also failing to bring rank-and-file members of its own churches into line with its teaching and practice. Both the successes and failures of social Christianity in the 1960s would leave enduring legacies.

## Theology in the Secular City

The 1960s were not only a time of urban crisis, but of significant theological change in the mainstream Christian churches as well. The Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church (1962-1965) fundamentally reordered Catholic social priorities, outlining a vision of deeper engagement with the modern world and with the global struggle for social justice, even as Church teachings built on older Catholic concerns, particularly regarding the dignity of labor, and more recently, of racial minorities. Ecumenical Protestantism, for its part, was even more experimental in its social theology, as the years of Niebuhrian realism slowly gave way to different theological voices that, in many ways, more closely echoed the idealism and transformative ambition of the Social Gospel than Niebuhr ever had.

Harvey Cox, in his much-discussed 1965 work, *The Secular City*, provided the most direct theological reflection on the challenges and possibilities of cities and secularism for Christian social witness.<sup>82</sup> Cox argued that the conjoined forces of secularism and urbanization, rather than being a threat to Christianity, were in fact ripe with new possibilities, breaking down the barriers that had insulated the church from the modern world in the past. However, other Christian thinkers were far more pragmatic in their approach to the problem of cities, seeking to find concrete, rather than theoretical, solutions to urban problems. Much of this, as church historian Loyde H. Hartley has noted, was inspired by experiments in Europe, which included urban missions, worker

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<sup>82</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). Cox's work sparked a lively theological debate among those interested in the implications of theology for urban ministry. See Daniel Callahan, *The Secular City Debate* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

priests, and new forms of church ministry designed to reach industrial workers and working class neighborhoods that had long been difficult for traditional church structures to reach.<sup>83</sup>

Although Los Angeles is the focal point of this study, in the larger American context, Chicago was far and away the most innovative city in the 1960s in terms of new urban ministries. Some of these innovations included “action training programs,” designed to train ministers to serve in urban settings and organize congregations. Moreover, Chicago continued, as it had for decades, to be the primary hub of the Industrial Areas Foundation’s community organizing activity.

One of the most significant thinkers among any of the mainstream Christian churches on urban matters in the 1960s was Gibson Winter. Today, Winter is mainly known as the author of the 1961 work, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*, which strongly criticized the tendency of Protestant churches at the time of financing new churches in the suburbs by liquidating inner city churches and made explicit the racial prejudice that such a strategy elucidated. But it was in Winter’s somewhat lesser-known work, *The New Creation as Metropolis* from 1963, that Gibson made clear that a new urban society was emerging, which, though rich in potential, would require churches to, as Gary Dorrien has it “reorganize themselves as regional centers that ministered to the needs and institutions of urban communities.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, Winter was arguing that

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<sup>83</sup> See Loyde H. Hartley’s essay, “Urban Church Literature,” in Clifford J. Green, ed., *Churches, Cities, and Human Community: Urban Ministry in the United States, 1945-1985* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1996, 308-363.

<sup>84</sup> Gibson Winter, *The New Creation as Metropolis* (New York: Macmillan, 1963). For Dorrien’s discussion of the importance of Winter for the development of Christian social thought, see Gary Dorrien,

the congregational structure itself was becoming outmoded in the contemporary city, and that new forms of church outreach and activism would be required to meet the challenges of urban ministry. Winter would prove both influential and prophetic, as the 1960s indeed saw urban churches, especially among mainline Protestants, form a host of new organizations to deal with the urban crisis.

This heady time in Christian intellectual circles contributed greatly to the development of both liberal theology and the mainstream churches' social witness in the modern world. Pushing beyond early Cold War concerns for social order, this new witness broadened its scope to include citizen empowerment and a cautious embrace of the forces of secularism. Nevertheless, the application of these principles in a metropolitan context brought ecumenical Christian social teaching into a fierce confrontation with the stubborn realities of race, politics, and resistance from both within and without the churches. Nowhere was that more apparent than in Los Angeles.

### **Proposition 14 and the Churches**

In 1963, the state of California passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act, making racial discrimination in the housing market illegal. The real estate industry and allied groups quickly sought to repeal the law, placing the controversial Proposition 14 on the 1964 California ballot to do so. In, Los Angeles, the battle against Proposition 14 was

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*Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 550ff. The quote is taken from Dorrien, 551.

arguably the single greatest catalyst to the development of interdenominational and interfaith alliances in the city, with several important organizations, including the Catholic Human Relations Council (CHRC) and the Valley Interfaith Council (VIC) founded expressly to mobilize opposition to the ballot initiative. In a time of increased ecumenical and interfaith outreach, the theological climate in the mainstream Christian churches was such that these kinds of collaborative enterprises were far more possible than they had been even a few years before. Nevertheless, the more concrete political reality of the possible repeal of the Rumford Fair Housing Act did more than theology could to unite a coalition of social Christians and their Jewish allies around a moral and political cause. It was also, less positively, a coalition of necessity, as many rank-and-file congregants resisted the efforts of church leaders and activists to keep fair housing legal in California.

The passage of the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1963, and the subsequent battle, orchestrated in large part by the California real estate industry, to repeal the Rumford Act in 1964 through Proposition 14 has featured significantly in recent work by the historians Mark Brilliant and Daniel Martinez HoSang, including the involvement of religious groups, both for and against.<sup>85</sup> In large measure, mainstream, non-evangelical Christian churches opposed the repeal of Rumford, while many evangelical Christian churches supported it. The campaign around Proposition 14 is crucial for this study as it reveals

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<sup>85</sup> See Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2010, 188-206, and Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2010, 53-90. Both authors discuss the role of religious groups in the support and opposition to Proposition 14. My account is partially drawn from their work, as well as my own research on the activities of the churches and other religious groups.

not only splits between mainstream and evangelical churches over issues of race in the 1960s, but highlights grassroots opposition to a liberalizing clergy from within the churches as well. In many ways, these divisions were exacerbated as the fight over Proposition 14 soon exploded into a wider discussion over race in Los Angeles in the wake of the Watts Uprising of 1965. Increasingly, the interdenominational social witness of the churches was becoming a minority position within their own congregations, albeit an important one, especially as suburbanization and the rise of conservative homeowner politics continued apace.

Ecumenical Protestant groups were united and forceful in their denunciations of Proposition 14. In October of 1964, just a month before the initiative appeared on the California ballot, NCC head Eugene Carson Blake and many leading mainline Protestant clergy took part in a protest march to Los Angeles City Hall which commenced from La Plaza Methodist Church, long a center of religious social activism in the city. Most mainline denominations issued explicit condemnations of the ballot measure, with many pacing their opposition in terms of basic moral principles of human dignity and of a defense of democracy itself. Striking an explicitly religious tone, the Los Angeles Presbytery warned that Proposition 14, if passed, would be a severe detriment to the cause of reconciliation in the life of the city and in the state of California.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the resolute backing of the mainline Protestant leadership of opposition to the initiative, church leaders faced resistance to their stance at the grassroots level.

Barbara Nelson, publisher of an Orange County-based newsletter, "Episcopalians for

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<sup>86</sup> "Protestants to March Against Proposition 14." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 03, 1964, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155034289?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

Christ,” deplored the involvement, especially, of national Episcopalian groups in the fight against Proposition 14, lamenting that “with unprecedented fervor, the laity is being pummeled with periodicals, leaflets, ‘Christian’ publications, forums, panel discussions, plays and sermons, all telling us how to vote...There is no longer a vestige of subtlety to the action of the ‘liberal’ clergy.”<sup>87</sup> She went on praise the values of conscience and free choice in political and religious matters which she felt the mainline clergy were violating in their campaign.

The battle against Proposition 14 also revealed fault lines in the Catholic Church in Los Angeles, where conflicts emerged over Cardinal McIntyre’s reticence to support efforts to oppose the ballot initiative, despite broad support for such measures by most of the mainstream churches, including the California Catholic Bishops’ Conference, of which McIntyre was a member.<sup>88</sup> In August of 1964, a group called Catholics for Racial Equality (CURE) began picketing archdiocesan chancery office because of McIntyre’s assertions that the issue of fair housing in California was a political, not a moral or religious matter, and therefore beyond the purview of his office as archbishop of Los Angeles. In turn, McIntyre’s view on Proposition 14 also reflected his broader refusal to engage with the politics of civil rights more generally, and on the same grounds. The cardinal’s critics seized on McIntyre’s earlier positions, when in 1958 he had battled

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<sup>87</sup> “Prop. 14 Attack by Episcopal Unit Deplored.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 08, 1964, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155017436?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>88</sup> McIntyre was considered an outlier by being the only prominent California religious leader who did not publicly condemn Proposition 14. See Dan L. Thrapp, “Effects of Pulpit View on Prop. 14 Analyzed.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 22, 1964. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155052650?accountid=14707>.



against an initiative to tax Catholic schools. “Apparently, discrimination against Catholics is a moral issue, but discrimination against Negroes is purely political,” wrote Leon Aubry, the director of CURE, in response to McIntyre. To Catholic racial liberals and others, it appeared that McIntyre in fact favored a selective entry into the public sphere, and only when it suited his and the archdiocese’s direct interests. Sit-ins and further demonstrations ensued, as outraged Catholic activists sought a reversal in McIntyre’s seemingly intractable position.<sup>89</sup>

What observers and activists failed to fully recognize at the time was that McIntyre, far from being aloof to secular politics, was in fact powerfully engaged in the promotion of a more conservative Catholic social vision, rooted in Catholic Cold War anticommunism and with deep sympathies for the emerging New Right of the 1960s. Through the archdiocesan newspaper, *The Tidings*, by many measures the official mouthpiece of McIntyre and his conservative Catholic allies, the cardinal staunchly supported, among other issues, the escalation of the Vietnam War and battle against left-wing political tendencies at home. As historians Lisa McGirr and Darren Dochuk have pointed out in various ways, *The Tidings* represented an important local manifestation of Southern California conservatism and helped support the emergence of the grassroots right that McGirr dubbed “suburban warriors.”<sup>90</sup> McIntyre’s failure to oppose

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<sup>89</sup> Leon Aubry. “Catholic Group Attacks Cardinal McIntyre’s Stand on Proposition 14.” *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), Aug 06, 1964, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/564707106?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015). The attention to McIntyre’s racial policies was a flashpoint in national debate among Catholics on the proper role of the Church’s social witness regarding civil rights.

<sup>90</sup> See Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2002, 107-158, and Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton), 2010, 344.

Proposition 14 is more accurately viewed, then, as his opposition to what he perceived to be liberalizing and radical elements within the Catholic Church.<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, those more liberal voices, especially on the issue of race and civil rights, became more vocal by the mid-1960s. The most celebrated example at the time was that of Father William Dubay. In 1964, the young priest wrote a letter to Pope Paul VI, demanding that McIntyre be removed as archbishop for his lack of effort on behalf of racial justice and the social teachings of the Catholic Church which forbade, on paper anyway, all forms of racial discrimination.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, McIntyre, as he would with Dubay, had officially silenced or transferred numerous priests and nuns for speaking out on matters of racial justice, to the great frustration of Catholic interracial groups such as the Catholic Human Relations Council, which placed issues of housing, segregation, and racial justice at the forefront of its policy concerns.<sup>93</sup> These critics were quick to point out that, although Catholics institutions such as parishes, hospitals, and schools were never officially segregated, it did not mitigate the social reality of rampant inequality and segregation among African Americans in Los Angeles.

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<sup>91</sup> Patrick Alitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America: 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 83-120.

<sup>92</sup> "Priests Gain Notoriety for Equal Rights Stand." *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition)* (1960-1973), Jan 05, 1965. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/494123092?accountid=14707>.

<sup>93</sup> "Angelenos Appeal to Pope Paul." *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), Dec 04, 1964. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/142081437>; Edwards, Betty J. "Gagged Cleric Says 'Silence can be Sinful'." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), Jan 09, 1965. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/493063051>. One of the more well-known "exiles" from McIntyre's Los Angeles was Father John Coffield, a civil rights activist who would go on to work with Cesar Chavez and the UFW.

Not all Catholics agreed with Dubay's assertions about McIntyre, however, with many pointing to the cardinal's work on behalf of programs for underprivileged youth and other charitable causes as evidence that McIntyre was not without concern for the poor and racial minorities. Indeed, even Dorothy Day was known to be fond of McIntyre from his days as a priest and later auxiliary bishop in New York. Nevertheless, for many educated and politically-engaged Catholics, Proposition 14 was in direct opposition to Catholic social teaching, especially regarding the proper social use of property that had been put forth by Pope Leo XIII in the 1890s. Aubry argued that Proposition 14 constituted "a flat denial of the papal teaching which declares that private property rights are not absolute and that a Catholic must not use his property in a way which injures the common welfare." Aubry went on to denounce McIntyre's silencing of priests who opposed the proposition: "It is a crime for Cardinal McIntyre to prevent priests from preaching papal social doctrine to local Catholics," he wrote, suggesting that McIntyre's position separated Los Angeles not only from other California dioceses, whose bishops had condemned Proposition 14, but also from the universal church itself.<sup>94</sup>

McIntyre eventually did sign on to the California Bishops Conference's official statement opposing Proposition 14, which made it clear that no Catholic voter who was well-formed in the social teachings of the faith could support the initiative, although he remained personally circumspect and only spoke publicly of the issue in order to demur from offering his opinion on the matter. Although it is unclear exactly why McIntyre relented in signing on to the statement, it can be reasonably supposed that he bowed to

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<sup>94</sup> Leon Aubry. "Catholic Group Attacks Cardinal McIntyre's Stand on Proposition 14." Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005), Aug 06, 1964, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/564707106> (accessed April 18, 2015).

some political pressure from among his fellow bishops, although this pressure did not translate into any kind of activism on McIntyre's part.

Despite McIntyre's half-hearted endorsement on the anti-Proposition 14 campaign, a representative of the cardinal, Father Joseph Francis, was on hand to give the invocation at a large rally at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in the summer of 1964 on behalf of civil rights. Dubbed the "Religious Witness for Human Dignity," the rally drew a crowd of over 14,000 people, and counted among its attendees a broad cross-section of mainstream religious leaders, including the Rev. John Burt, head of the Southern California Council of Churches, and Rabbi Paul Durbin, who was active in a host of social justice concerns in the region, to hear the featured speaker, Martin Luther King, Jr. As was typical of King, he brought a message of both challenge and hope to the gathered crowd, and made pointed criticisms of a religious leadership that had not done enough to defend their own principles of human dignity. "So often," thundered King, "I've been disappointed with religious institutions serving as tail-lights instead of headlights. I'm not one to say the need for demonstrations is over. We must expose the injustices in our system." King went on to urge the 200 gathered religious leaders to continue to press their congregations to help defeat Proposition 14, which he argued would "in substance...legalize segregation."<sup>95</sup>

When Proposition 14 was passed on the November, 1964 California ballot, it represented a stunning setback for the church groups that had arrayed themselves against

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<sup>95</sup> For an account of the rally and for King's broader remarks at it, see Paul Weeks, "Dr. King Urges Speedy Passage of Rights Bill." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 01, 1964, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/168638327?accountid=14707> (accessed April 18, 2015).

its passage. Perhaps naively, churches had relied on their power of moral suasion to alert their congregants to the moral dimensions of fair housing, and the underlying issues of racial exclusion. Yet, the efforts on the part of the mainstream churches left a legacy on the development of social Christianity more generally. By responding to calls from church bodies to witness to Christian social values in the public sphere, Christian activists and their allies, both secular and religious, created networks of advocacy that pushed against the walls of separation between Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as the equally stubborn divisions between black and white congregations.<sup>96</sup> In some ways, however, those walls would prove more resilient than the anti-Proposition 14 campaigners could have imagined. The Watts uprising of the following year would painfully highlight the abiding fissures of race in Los Angeles, and the promises of the secular city would seem far off indeed. Nevertheless, the events of the Watts Riots, and even more particularly their aftermath, would propel social Christianity into new and experimental avenues of engagement and witness in a city in the midst of seismic convulsions.

### **Watts and After**

The civil violence that engulfed the Watts section of Los Angeles in 1965 led to a much more intense engagement with issues of race and urban ministry on the part of

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<sup>96</sup> Dan L. Thrapp, "Effects of Pulpit View on Prop. 14 Analyzed." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 22, 1964, and "Church Stand Against Prop. 14 Called Right: Lost Battle, Not War, Presbyterian Pastor Asserts; Religious Role in Life Praised.." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 17, 1965. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155075546?accountid=14707>.

mainstream churches than had been attempted previously, and built on the efforts launched around the fight against Proposition 14. Moreover, the Watts riots launched a period of experimentation in urban ministry on the part of mainstream churches as they struggled to respond to the racial divides that the riots had revealed.

In the immediate aftermath of Watts, however, the transcendent possibilities of the modern metropolis seemed out of reach, as mainstream Christian observers from around the country recoiled at the explosion of civil violence and the grim racial realities that the unrest revealed. Writing in the *Christian Century* shortly after the uprising, the Episcopal priest and veteran of the civil rights movement Malcolm Boyd laid partial responsibility at the feet of churches, white and black, for systematically failing to comprehend the dire situation of poor blacks in Watts. “With precious few exceptions,” he wrote, “the churches of the community have failed to act morally or to provide leadership in race relations. ‘Good’ people have been hiding behind the facade of religion devoid of prophetic utterance or social involvement, have isolated themselves from personal confrontation with oppressed Negroes.”<sup>97</sup> Despite his righteous anger, in many ways Boyd replicated a typical liberal position in the 1950s and 60s regarding race relations, namely, that it was essentially a moral problem requiring a conversion of heart on the part of white Americans and at least some personal contact with blacks and their struggles. Boyd expanded on his religious and political analysis of Watts by rooting it explicitly in the Christian language of hope, or lack thereof, as he recounted his tour of the devastated neighborhood with the Rev. Morris Samuel, a white Episcopal priest who

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<sup>97</sup> See Malcolm Boyd, “Violence in Los Angeles,” *Christian Century* 82, no. 36 (1965): *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2015).

at the time was vice-chairman of CORE's Los Angeles chapter: "It became apparent to us that the hopelessness of the Negro in Watts, and the causes underlying it, simply are not comprehended [by whites]. Communication has been...virtually non-existent between Negroes and the white power structure."<sup>98</sup>

Boyd approvingly cited a letter, printed in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, by the presbytery of the Los Angeles Commission on Religion and Race, titled "An Open Letter of Confession and Concern," which stated, "Where we [the churches] should have listened, we have preached," and promised further to "to listen with open and receptive minds to the to the repeated charges of questionable business practices, poverty, inadequate housing...and police brutality."<sup>99</sup> For Boyd, this statement by Los Angeles' church leaders went at least somewhat beyond promises to listen to blacks and to work toward addressing underlying, structural issues of injustice. Nevertheless, Boyd noted that, in Watts itself, such affirmations by the churches rang hollow, with the long history of neglect by religious leaders difficult to forget.

An editorial in *The Christian Century*, also published in the wake of the riots, lambasted the "interfaith trio" of Cardinal McIntyre, Billy Graham, and Will Herberg for condemning the uprising and failing to recognize its causes and greater significance. However, much like Boyd, the editors of *The Christian Century* saw cause for hope in the mobilization of ecumenical Protestant churches and sympathetic Catholic clergy, among others. In particular, the editorial praised the statements of the Southern California-

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

Nevada Council of Churches which promised “to mobilize the full resources of the churches to meet the present crisis and work forcefully for a community where all citizens have the opportunity to attain their full stature as human beings.”<sup>100</sup> The editorial went on to lay the blame for the riots less on the lack of communication between whites and blacks, but on the acute political discontent unleashed in Watts by the passage of Proposition 14 a year earlier.<sup>101</sup>

While the liberal Christian establishment wrung its hands over the implications of Watts, on the local scene churches and religious organizations took a more concrete approach. Among mainstream white churches and progressive black congregations, Watts significantly transformed the shape of urban outreach. One example was the Catholic Human Relations Council (CHRC), begrudgingly tolerated by McIntyre as a group of “Chicago Catholics,” which was a node on a much larger network of progressive religious activists and organizations in Los Angeles that rose up in the tumult of the mid-1960s.<sup>102</sup> The connections that the organization made provide a privileged glimpse into the development of social Christianity both on the ground in Los Angeles and in the nation at large.

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<sup>100</sup> “Does anyone really care.” *Christian Century* 82, no. 38 (1965): *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2015).

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> It is unclear exactly what McIntyre meant by his use of the term “Chicago Catholics,” but the Catholic Church in Chicago and the midwest more generally was known to be more progressive than the coasts. The archives of the Catholic Human Relations Council can be found in the Catholic Human Relations Council Collection, CSLA-27, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University. The archives of the CHRC provide a trove of information on progressive religious activism in Los Angeles in the 1960s-1970s, making clear the numerous connections the group had across denominational lines.



Founded in 1963 by an African American Catholic named Horace Williams and several others to advocate for fair housing, the CHRC provided a much-needed Catholic voice in the civil rights arena in Los Angeles, as the archdiocese had developed a national reputation for the backwardness of its leadership on matters of race. But the CHRC was not only a Catholic civil rights organization, but also had its hand in antiwar activism, interfaith outreach, and legislative appeals for progressive causes. While Catholic in outlook, the CHRC was open to non-Catholics as a matter of policy, and was thoroughly ecumenical in its outlook, taking many of its activist cues from liberal Protestantism, especially the California Council of Churches, whose legislative agenda figures prominently in the CHRC's files.

In greater measure, however, what the CHRC was most focused on were specifically urban social justice issues, and of the application of Catholic social teaching to matters of urban politics. The CHRC quickly developed relationships with a host of organizations that bridged the religious and activist worlds of the 1960s. Among these was the Center on Metropolitan Mission in Service Training (COMMIT), which was related to the Urban Training Center for Christian Mission (UTC) in Chicago. Established in part by Gibson Winter, UTC's purpose was to train ministers and activists to serve in urban areas, developing skills in community organizing and outreach to underserved populations, as well as to advocate for social change. While the effort in Chicago was successful, counting a young Jesse Jackson as one of its early graduates, COMMIT in Los Angeles proved more ephemeral, as did many of the experiments in urban ministry that characterized the period.

As would be the case of many urban Christian experiments in the 1960s, a general lack of funding bedeviled efforts on the part of churches and affiliated organizations to address the urban crisis. In important ways, the churches' moral ambition in navigating issues of race, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, outstripped its financial wherewithal to put its social values into practice. As world-making as social Christianity's project of the transformation of the secular city was, it was perpetually hampered by the magnitude of the issues it took on, and the paucity of resources to address them.

In contrast to white churches, progressive black congregations in Los Angeles were often far more pragmatic in turning their social agenda into concrete reality. In the mid-1960s, many such congregations quickly moved to the forefront of responses to the Watts Riots, including long-standing churches that were the center of black Christian life in the city. Among these was Second Baptist Church, famous during the civil rights era as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "west coast home."

Second Baptist Church had long been a center of civil rights activism in Los Angeles. Its pastor throughout much of the 1940s and 50s was Rev. J. Raymond Henderson, who was nationally recognized for his work on behalf of the NAACP and the Urban League and was a close friend of Martin Luther King, Sr. Parishioners from Second Baptist had been instrumental in a series of civil rights actions, including the desegregation of Brookside Park in Pasadena and Santa Monica beach during Henderson's long pastorship. As both the spiritual home of many of Los Angeles' black

elite and a center of social activism, Second Baptist's profile was already high when a new pastor named Thomas Kilgore replaced Henderson in 1963.<sup>103</sup>

Kilgore had been educated at Union Theological Seminary and studied under Reinhold Niebuhr, where he took on his mentor's Christian realism and his concern about race and the fate of American cities. Kilgore's path to Second Baptist was distinguished, and included a stop at Harlem's Friendship Baptist Church, where he helped establish the New York office of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). While a pastor in Harlem, Kilgore combined a strong emphasis on civil rights activism with more pragmatic efforts on behalf of the community, including the establishment of youth groups and after-school programs, as well as an expansion of church facilities that included space reserved for low-income housing for the neighborhood's poor. Kilgore would bring his talents as both civil rights advocate and institution-builder with him to Second Baptist after receiving the "call" to serve there in 1963.<sup>104</sup>

Upon his arrival in Los Angeles, Kilgore set about launching a new era in Second Baptist's long history that emphasized servant leadership in the community. He quickly helped establish the Henderson Community Center in 1965, and just a year later, the Second Baptist Children's Center, which provided day care services for over 90 children in the surrounding neighborhood, all the while serving as the west coast head of the SCLC.

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<sup>103</sup> For a brief, but informative history of the Second Baptist Church in Los Angeles, see Thomas Kilgore Jr. and Jini Kilgore Ross, *A Servant's Journey: The Life and Work of Thomas Kilgore* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press), 1998, 219ff.

<sup>104</sup> This account is adapted from Kilgore's autobiography, *A Servant's Journey*. See note 20, above.

Kilgore took advantage of new opportunities to receive federal funding from Great Society programs in order to further Second Baptist's agenda. The Children's Center was funded with a grant of \$97,200 under the auspices of Title V of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and became a pilot program for the training of day care workers that drew the attention of The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare as a model of governmental and church-based cooperation to serve underprivileged populations. This modest venture marked the beginning of Kilgore's deep involvement with civil government, which would come to fruition years later with his service as head of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency under Mayor Tom Bradley's administration in the 1980s.<sup>105</sup>

While Kilgore and other establishment black congregations in Los Angeles expanded their involvement with all levels of government, other socially-engaged churches took an even more experimental approach to urban ministry. One of the most innovative initiatives among churches in post-1965 Los Angeles was the formation in 1968 of the Greater University Parish (GUP), comprised of 13 different Protestant and Catholic congregations near the campus of the University of Southern California in the mid-city section of the city. The coordinator of the parish, Lois Hamer, noted at the time that it was the only such incorporation of parishes across racial and denominational lines in the country, with the explicit mission of serving the needs of its community. Although it was only formally established three years after the Watts Riots, representatives from the various congregations had been working together since the riots on range of

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, 67ff.

community service projects. By 1968, GUP was providing space and support for a host of other organizations, including the Crisis Coalition, which mounted protests at City Hall against police brutality, and another group providing recreational opportunities for Mexican American gang members. Hamer admitted that GUP had friendly relations with some of the more militant factions in the community, and took the stance that working with them was the best way to achieve mutual goals, even though the member congregations of GUP did not consider themselves to radicals.<sup>106</sup>

If not radical, GUP was certainly on the cutting edge of interdenominational collaboration in the 1960s, and its projects and goals were no less ambitious than those of their militant allies in the community. The pressing concerns that GUP identified in 1968 included attracting light industry to a neighborhood in desperate need of employment opportunities, advocating for adequate housing, and developing a sense of what Hamer called a “total community awareness,” which seems to have meant a broadening of the sense of shared struggle among a diverse array of congregants.<sup>107</sup> The GUP success in some areas was rapid, with the Hoover Interfaith Housing Project, an effort that grew out of GUP congregations, becoming one of the first groups to purchase land for affordable housing from the city’s Community Redevelopment Agency, which had been established after the Watts Riots to stimulate economic growth in deindustrialized sections of Los Angeles.

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<sup>106</sup> This account is adapted from an extensive piece on GUP that appeared in John Dart, “13 Churches Join Hands to Serve Area Near USC.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Sep 15, 1968, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155967645?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

Even though the activities of GUP were centered primarily on social service work, Hamer placed the mission of the “parish” in distinctively Christian terms, and claimed that the idea to incorporate as a single entity was grounded in an interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew 24:25, in which those that did not help the needy and impoverished in this life would be doomed in the next, giving the lie to critics, then and now, of socially-engaged forms of Christianity as merely social work in the guise of religion.

Apart from its professed biblical mandate, the Greater University parish also captured the spirit of experimentation in ministry argued for by Harvey Cox, Gibson Winter, and others. The member congregations of GUP recognized that their respective institutions were as much a hindrance as a help to their mission of evangelization in a deindustrialized urban setting such as it existed in the late-1960s around USC. Rather than remaining embedded within the narrow parameters of their individual churches, GUP provided a much more salient social witness through this innovative arrangement that challenged religious and racial divides.

Other projects based on building interracial solidarity throughout the churches of Los Angeles were less successful, as was the case with Project Equality. This project, which arose out of an initiative of Chicago’s National Catholic Council for Interracial Justice (NCCIJ), was an early affirmative action program, in which participating congregations agreed to only spend church funds on contractors and firms that did not engage in racial discrimination and gave a preference to minorities in their own hiring. The program was ambitious, seeking to leverage the billions of dollars that churches in

the United States spent annually at the time, including large-scale operations such as schools and hospitals. Project Equality's organizers envisioned it as a concrete way to use the church's moral authority and financial clout to break down the walls of segregation and discrimination and "to translate fine principles of on racial brotherhood and justice into deeds." The project's got off to an auspicious start, with hundreds of congregations and other religious communities signing on to the affirmative action plan and local offices opening in many cities across the country after the success of the pilot programs in St. Louis and Detroit.<sup>108</sup>

Project Equality's method was pragmatic and direct, with churches sending out questionnaires and "commitment forms" to prospective contractors asking about their policies on preferential racial hiring. Those which responded positively were in turn listed in Project Equality's official "Buyers' Guide," with the express pledge that their firms would be privileged over all others in the allocation of church contracts. But Project Equality did not only rely on the word of the firms, but implemented a robust verification process which ensured the firms' compliance with the goals of the project. Trained compliance officers not only removed certain firms for not living up to their end of the agreement with Project Equality, but offered concrete advice to firms on how to improve their recruiting and hiring practices to better reflect the project's agenda of greater racial equality.

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<sup>108</sup> This account is largely adapted from Harry Bernstein, "Church Plan to Fight Racial Injustice Fails." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 17, 1968, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/156115583?accountid=14707> (accessed April 18, 2015), and Michael Stone, "Project Equality today." *Christian Century* 87, no. 3 (January 21, 1970): 79-82. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2015).

As with other national and local church-based programs for racial justice in the 1960s, Project Equality had an explicit religious mandate, despite its similar appearance to secular forms of activism at the time. Writing in the *Christian Century* a few years after Project Equality's founding, liberal Protestant observer Michael Stone, a divinity student at the University of Chicago, noted that the NCCIJ's initiative was vital not only for helping promote an end to racial discrimination, but for strengthening the social witness of the churches, protestant and Catholic, as well.<sup>109</sup> Much like the GUP and the various projects connected with the Catholic Human Relations Council of Los Angeles, Project Equality was rooted in specific and evolving ideas about the proper role of the churches in the social order of the nation, but most especially in urban centers where so many religious institutions were located and exerted influence. While many of these projects were interreligious and interdenominational, they nonetheless reflected a concerted effort on the part of social Christians to embed Christian social principles in the heart of the postwar metropolis.

Nationally, Project Equality's success varied, owing in part to its decentralized model of local control. While some local offices, most notably Detroit's, were responsible for real change on the part of many firms' hiring practices, others claimed fewer victories, often as a result of meager funding for the project, or timid enforcement of its compliance guidelines.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Michael Stone, "Project Equality today." *Christian Century* 87, no. 3 (January 21, 1970): 79-82. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>110</sup> For a series of snapshots of how Project Equality operated in different cities, see: "Project Equality Workshops on Hiring to be Held Feb. 27." *Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)*, Feb 22, 1972. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/532632957?accountid=14707>; Peter Millones "Project Equality Striving



The failure of Project Equality in Los Angeles was also the result of a lack of funding, but conflict among the member churches and religious organizations was even more to blame. The Los Angeles office of Project Equality had opened in October of 1965, just a few months after the first offices had opened in the midwest earlier that same year. Almost immediately, however, there were problems. The Catholic Church, led by Cardinal McIntyre, refused to participate in the program, despite its roots in Catholic activism, albeit of the sort the archbishop held in contempt. In many cities, the participation of the Catholic Church was vital to Project Equality's success, not only because of the Church's large size and institutional muscle, but also because the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church ensured wide participation among Catholic parishes if, and only if, the local bishop backed the initiative.<sup>111</sup> This was the case in Detroit, where that city's Catholic archbishop, John Dearden, was an early and ardent supporter of Project Equality, resulting in concrete gains in the fight for racial equality. Some observers estimated that the program was responsible for over 500 new minority hires in the area.<sup>112</sup>

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to Get Jobs for Members of Minorities." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Dec 26, 1968. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/118293643?accountid=7418>; "Todd Defends Project Equality." *Bay State Banner (1965-1979)*, Aug 10, 1967. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/371341287?accountid=14707>.

<sup>111</sup> Bernstein, Harry. "Controversy Stalls Protestant, Jewish 'Project Equality'." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 29, 1967. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155643410>.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Stone, "Project Equality today." *Christian Century* 87, no. 3 (January 21, 1970): 79-82. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 18, 2015).

Without the support of the Catholic Church, Project Equality in Los Angeles managed to survive for three years on funds mainly drawn from mainline Protestant congregations, but it faced fierce headwinds from the beginning. Many in Los Angeles' conservative business community feared that Project Equality amounted to a boycott, despite the initiative's explicit rejection of that particular strategy.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, the Los Angeles office's shoestring budget meant that no executive director of the program could be named, resulting in a duplication of efforts among the participating religious institutions. In October of 1968, the Los Angeles office of Project Equality officially closed, with the national office in Chicago unfairly laying the blame on the lack of financial support of the participating Protestant congregations. Dr. Forrest Weir, then head of the Southern California Council of Churches, lamented both the office's closing and the NCCIJ's characterization of Project Equality's failure in Los Angeles as the fault of mainline Protestants. Nevertheless, Weir reiterated his and the council's firm support for Project Equality's agenda of racial equality and affirmative action, even if its effort in Los Angeles ultimately collapsed.<sup>114</sup>

The post-Watts initiatives of socially-progressive church groups and allied religious organizations were varied and experimental, and further helped establish the enduring contours not only of urban ministry, but of an increasingly interdenominational social Christianity as well. Moreover, Christian activists and their varied projects charted

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<sup>113</sup> Bernstein, Harry. "Controversy Stalls Protestant, Jewish 'Project Equality'." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 29, 1967. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155643410?accountid=7418>

<sup>114</sup> See Harry Bernstein, "Church Plan to Fight Racial Injustice Fails." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 17, 1968, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/156115583?accountid=14707> (accessed April 18, 2015).

a trajectory for social Christianity that would be, in many ways, distinctly urban, committed to racial justice, and hopeful about the potential impact of the churches' social witness on the secular world.

### **Goals Project**

A fascinating, but less well-known, attempt by social Christians to influence the course of urban life in Los Angeles occurred in the realm of urban planning, beginning in 1966. The Los Angeles Goals Project had an ambitious agenda to involve religious groups in city planning, and in the broader areas of the “economic, social, and functional factors of future urban living.”<sup>115</sup> The City Planning Commission, headed by Calvin Hamilton, who was himself a lay leader in the United Presbyterian Church, together with Rev. John Wagner, of the National Council of Churches' Christian Life and Mission Office, set out to canvas various churches and other religious organizations, in order to chart a trajectory for city planning that would respond to the needs of the city's various religious communities. Wagner was appointed head of what became known as the Inter-religious Committee of the Los Angeles Goals Project, and the NCC provided staffing for his office, bringing the NCC's agenda into the very heart of city policy-making.

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<sup>115</sup> See the fascinating WCC document, *The Church for Others: Two Reports on the Missionary Structure of the Congregation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches), 1966, 7-28. It provides a window into the ambitious social thought of the WCC at the time with regard to cities, but also reveals its naivete on issues of race, especially.

Hamilton and Wagner's method for soliciting the input of religious organizations reflected a commitment on the part of the NCC to value grassroots participation and a decentralized decision-making process. Religious groups were invited to reflect deeply on the "contribution of the mission of religion toward the life of the citizen of Los Angeles in the future and the role of this mission in helping to shape the future civilization within this region to accomplish the goals identified," vividly illustrating the world-making, or at least city-making, ambitions of the program.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, participating religious groups were invited to help create entirely new structures within existing religious, governmental, and community institutions in order to realize the committee's proposals.

The Inter-religious Committee set about its work by establishing expert study groups involving both theologians and social scientists, as well as other groups headed by community leaders to identify local concerns. Even in an organization committed to listening to the concerns of ordinary citizens, trained academics were called on to set the framework of the discussions in theological and sociological terms, recalling an earlier generation of Social Gospellers that relied on the work of the earliest generation of American sociologists in the Progressive Era.

Nevertheless, Calvin Hamilton and John Wagner did place citizen participation at the center of their amalgam of spiritual and policy concerns. In a featured article in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1968, Hamilton argued that "Los Angeles has been called the incredible city and...the city of the future...It is also opportunity and imagination...But

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<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

mostly, it is people-- their talents, desires, and ambitions.” Hamilton went on to point out that “city planning is still legally and psychologically tied to the *physical development* approach, [but] the physical development of the city should result from the fundamental needs and desires of the people.”<sup>117</sup> But the direct participation of the NCC, as well as the intense interest of the WCC in the Goals Project, reflects a broader focus of the ecumenical Protestant churches on the possibilities of the “secular city” and of a deeper engagement of the Christian faith with the modern world.

Indeed Hamilton and Wagner went about their task with nearly missionary zeal, with observers at the time remarking, somewhat derisively, on “the gospel according to Calvin Hamilton.”<sup>118</sup> The Goals Project, including its Inter-religious Committee, amassed vast amounts of data submitted not only from churches, but civic organizations, schools, clubs, and even private residences. “Viewpointers,” as the mostly female volunteers for the Project were called, roamed the city armed with a 32-page document full of discussion prompts, with the very 1960s-sounding goal of “attempting to get that kind of expression which seeks from this human settlement an articulation of what the human beings of this area desire from the future civilization.”<sup>119</sup>

The WCC, specifically its Department on Studies in Evangelism, made the Los Angeles Goals Project, and Los Angeles itself, a model for the future of the churches’

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<sup>117</sup> Calvin Hamilton, “The Making of a Megalopolis,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File): 4. Jul 21 1968. *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Apr. 2015.

<sup>118</sup> “Calvinism in City Planning,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), May 12, 1968. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155906459?accountid=7418>.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

missionary enterprise. The WCC was especially interested in the issues that had emerged in the initial phases of the Goals Project, including developing an ethic of planning that allowed for “social justice,” the role that religious communities could play for “groups which could not make themselves heard (Watts),” and the tension between individual aspirations and “the shape of the metropolis.”<sup>120</sup> But what continues to fascinate about the WCC’s report on Hamilton and Wagner’s Goals Project are the ways in which the city itself was depicted as a kind of church-- a place of human encounter and, implicitly at least, Christian fellowship.

For the WCC, the Goals Project represented new opportunities to bring the Christian message to the urban public sphere, and even a reimagining of the relationship of church and state. The report asked whether participation by the churches in a project of a government agency was proper, and if it was, whether it signaled a new and emerging role for the church in the modern world. The report concluded that it did, and that traditional (Protestant) Christian notions of the separation of the private realm of faith and the world of policy and government would have to be rethought.

But the WCC concluded that the greatest value of the Goals Project was the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with various urban communities as a “style of missionary presence in the church.”<sup>121</sup> In this manner, the church would not assert its moral authority so much as invite partners into a conversation about shared values, aspirations, and needs. Of particular note for the Department of Evangelism was

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<sup>120</sup> *The Church for Others*, 122

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 124

the ways in which the Goals Project had brought participants into relationship with Los Angeles' Jewish community and a sharing with Jewish groups of the "prophetic task" of religious witness in the city.<sup>122</sup>

For the theologians and other church representatives of the WCC, the Goals Project had a deeper significance as well, as it represented a concrete attempt on the part of modern Christians to engage with an increasingly secular world. In the same report, the WCC outlined its diagnosis of the state of human society from a global perspective. Throughout, the Department on Studies in Evangelism offered an account of social change that was in line with most ecumenical social thought, Protestant and Catholic, at the time. "To look at the headlines of any newspaper of any country in the world today is to encounter again and again the same terms which have become a kind of shorthand describing the situation in which mankind now finds itself," the report stated.<sup>123</sup> The report identified a range of issues, from "crisis" to "urbanization" to "racialism" and "world revolution," as the most pressing concerns of global society. In part, this reading of the "signs of the times" encapsulates a moment in the development of social Christianity in which the churches struggled to remain relevant in what they perceived to be a rapidly changing world. The Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church had made similar pronouncements about the need of the Church to embed itself more deeply in the social struggles of the world at large. But this turn toward modernity also brought

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<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, 8.

the ecumenical Protestant churches into a more direct encounter with the forces of secularization.

Echoing the work of Harvey Cox, who was a member of the working group responsible for the report, the WCC celebrated, rather than denounced, the rising tide of secularism in the modern world and in the contemporary metropolis. The authors wrote, “Secularization...is therefore inherent in the biblical faith in God, the creator of all, the only one who is holy in himself,” and went on to argue that “the Church may therefore scrutinize historical developments with an open mind, realizing that in these developments it can discern...the traces of God who is at work in the history of men.”<sup>124</sup> However abstract the theologizing of the authors, it had concrete ramifications as it offered a Christian vision for recognizing “Christ outside the walls of the Church.”<sup>125</sup>

For the WCC, the Los Angeles Goals Project was one such example of an attempt to find Christ “outside the walls” of the Church and to make its modern Christian social vision a reality. Specifically, the Goals Project was an opportunity for, in the WCC’s phrasing, to allow “the world to provide the agenda,” and to create more responsive church structures to meet the needs of contemporary society. Among the world’s agenda items, according to the report, was the need, especially in cities, for the Christian churches to provide hope and meaning in an increasingly atomized world in which

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<sup>124</sup> *The Church for Others*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*



loneliness, “race hatred,” and anonymity are counterbalanced by a sense of an emerging global community and a hunger for unity.<sup>126</sup>

As abstract and idealistic as the report now sounds, it was very much a product of a particular moment in ecumenical Christian social thought that melded 1960s-era idealism with more traditional conceptions of Christian universalism and missionary drive. It also illustrates the staggeringly vast ambition of Christian social thought at the time, which sought, despite professions of new-found humility, to transform global society into a “new creation.” A narrow focus on race, however important that issue was for the churches, was never the sole priority of theologians and Christian social activists. Rather, the scope of the ecumenical Christian worldview encompassed a broad vision of human community writ large, which might go some way in explaining why even progressive Christian communities found it difficult to focus their energies on the issue of race relations, as the very scope of their social project hindered a more direct confrontation with the color-line.

The final result of the work of the Inter-religious Committee was a working paper with the evocative title of , “Why Not?: Social and Human Goals for the Los Angeles Region,” and it was met with resounding disdain by the Los Angeles City Council, prompting *Los Angeles Times* journalist Ray Hebert to proclaim the council’s reaction to Hamilton “the severest attack a city official has been forced to take...in many years.”<sup>127</sup> What angered many of the councilman was the Inter-religious Committee’s assertion that

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<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Herbert Ray, “Angered by Goals Project Booklet,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Mar 31, 1968, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155919895?accountid=14707> (accessed April 13, 2015).

the council itself was no longer an adequate representative of the people's interests and was overly beholden to the influence of special interest groups. Councilman John Gibson, who chaired the City Council's Planning Committee, demanded that Hamilton cease distributing the working paper, and an investigation was launched to determine exactly how many churches and religious organizations had knowingly signed on to the report's deeply critical conclusions. No doubt some of the political antagonism toward the Inter-religious Committee's report stemmed from distrust over the NCC's liberal agenda, which included at the time a thoroughgoing antagonism toward the war in Vietnam. Wagner acknowledged as much, pointing out that some on the council were suspicious of a possible conspiracy because of the NCC's involvement. However, Wagner pushed back on these claims, arguing instead that the report represented a sincere attempt by the NCC to "agonize with the issues of the development of Los Angeles," and that the churches, over the objections of many church-goers, had a rightful duty to speak in the public square.<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, later reports called into question just how responsive to grassroots concerns the Goals Project actually was, with one participant tellingly claiming that "[Hamilton] listens patiently, smoking his pipe, then gives no sign he has heard a word you said."<sup>129</sup> Despite the ad hominem attack, these critics of the Hamilton and Wagner's strategy might have had a point. The Goals Project, in many ways, paid lip service to the idea of grassroots participation in city planning, but framed it in theological categories

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<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> "Calvinism in City Planning," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 12, 1968. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/155906459?accountid=7418>.

inaccessible to all but a few close associates of Hamilton and Wagner. In its attempt to discover Christ “outside the walls of the Church,” the Goals Project ran headlong into the realities of a city riven by dissent, racial animosity, and political discord which militated against its overly optimistic model based on dialogue and Christian transformation. Neighborhood and congregation-based strategies, such as GUP and other initiatives that developed later in the decade and into the 1970s, would prove far more effective in addressing the concerns of ordinary citizens and congregants, even if it meant significantly narrowing the scope of the social witness of the churches.

The failure of the Goals Project, as well as the uneven acceptance of progressive racial policies on the part of mainstream churches in the 1960s, represented a series of lost opportunities for the churches to more fully enact its social policies. Nevertheless, in grappling with the political crosscurrents at play in the fight against Proposition 14, the aftermath of the riots in Watts, and in attempting to bring Christian social policies to bear on a citywide level had tangible results, both within the churches and in Los Angeles at large. Watts, and the urban crisis more generally, prompted churches to rethink their customarily moderate stance on racial issues and to develop innovative strategies, however successful, to deal with a changed urban landscape in Los Angeles. Moreover, these strategies, together with a renewed theological emphasis on urban ministry and the problems of cities, helped forge a distinctive strand of social Christianity that was increasingly progressive on matters of race, committed to citizen participation in addressing urban issues, and more attentive to the voices of protest emanating from marginalized communities.

Despite the many setbacks experienced by Christian activists and organizations in this period, the churches did manage to find a prophetic voice within the “secular city.” As the events depicted in this chapter have shown, this was far from accidental, reflecting instead the shifting theological grounds that brought the mainstream churches into a deeper engagement with the forces of secularism and the global struggle for justice, at least in its local manifestations in Los Angeles. If race was never far from the center of the churches concern in the 1960s, the even larger demands of building just human communities was just as central to the project of social Christianity in the period.

Just as importantly, the events of the 1960s in Los Angeles charted a new trajectory for Christian social witness in the city. While large-scale efforts such as the Goals Project foundered because of resistance among ordinary, middle-class citizens, smaller, more neighborhood and community-based projects flourished, albeit briefly in many cases. In retrospect, the ambitious scope of social Christianity from the end of the Second World War until the 1960s was remarkable, seeking as it did to transform cities and human community through the application of Christian social thought and policy. From Catholic activists inspired by the modernizing trends unleashed by the Second Vatican Council, to ecumenical Protestants inspired by their participation in the black freedom struggle, the legacy of social Christianity in the 1960s left a lasting mark in Los Angeles.

Nevertheless, change was coming. For a variety of reasons, liberal Christian bodies such as the National Council of Churches would rather quickly begin to lose their influential position at both a national and local level, and religious voices in general

would find it increasingly difficult to speak with authority in the secular city. Some of this was the result of external factors and a changing religious and political culture, which included declining church membership, especially among mainline Protestant churches. But it also occurred because of tensions within churches themselves and the development of new, grassroots forms of social Christianity which were often beyond the institutional control of the churches. If the witness of social Christianity in the 1960s attempted to embed itself in the structures of the city, these new forms would set about instead to transform neighborhoods, barrios, and other marginalized communities. This “rising down” of social Christianity in the wake of the 1960s is the subject of the next chapter.

### Chapter 3

#### **Rising Down: Social Christianity from Below in Post-Civil Rights Era Los Angeles**

On April 10, 1967, less than two years after the Watts Uprising had engulfed the heart of African American Los Angeles in flames, the Rev. James Hargett, minister of the historically-black Church of Christian Fellowship, spoke at the Watts Happening Coffee House, which had been opened in the aftermath of the riots by the Commission on Church and Race of the Southern California Council of Churches. His subject was the relationship between “Christ and Black Power,” and the broader ties between Christian faith and the emerging, more militant strand of civil rights activism that was taking root across the country in urban, African American neighborhoods like Watts. Hargett argued that the “‘Black Power’ cry [implies] the second phase of the Americanization of the Negro American...the acquisition and responsible or wise use of power.” Hargett was direct in his diagnosis of why such a turn in the political strategy of black was needed, citing “white backlash, dead civil rights bills, and the increased resistance to open housing,” no doubt recalling the failure of the churches to counteract the passage of Proposition 14 and to implement more robust civil rights legislation after 1965. As a Christian minister, however, Hargett ended his appeal for Black Power on a hopeful note,

foreseeing a day in which the chaos that the Watts Uprising had unleashed would give way to “an organic unity of concern and involvement in the needs and goals of all Americans.” For Hargett, there was no contradiction between his vision of a black nationalism inflected with Christianity and larger goals of racial unity on a national scale.<sup>130</sup>

Hargett’s embrace of Black Power occurred just a year after Stokely Carmichael had uttered the phrase for the first time, and two years before the James Forman would deliver his demands for reparations in the Black Manifesto to a shocked congregation at Manhattan’s Riverside Church, the most prominent ecumenical Protestant congregation in the country.<sup>131</sup> Seen from the perspective of the long African American freedom struggle, Hargett’s speech in Watts speaks to an intimate relationship between Christian thought and activism and the currents of black nationalism that historians have only recently begun to uncover in detail. However, it also is indicative of a much broader movement within social Christianity that developed in the aftermath of the “long, hot summers” of the late-1960s, in which liberationist theological currents began to circulate in urban congregations across denominational lines as they sought, individually and

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<sup>130</sup> For an account of Hargett’s talk in Watts, see “Rev. Hargett at Watts Meeting,” *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), Apr 13, 1967, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/564862493?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

<sup>131</sup> The text of Forman’s Black Manifesto, including the reparation demands, may be accessed at [http://www.episcopalarchives.org/Afro-Anglican\\_history/exhibit-test/pdf/blackmanifesto.pdf](http://www.episcopalarchives.org/Afro-Anglican_history/exhibit-test/pdf/blackmanifesto.pdf). For a discussion of the role of black churches in the civil rights struggle, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty* (New York: Random House, 2008), 401-517.

collectively, to respond to the fractured social fabric of cities from Newark to Los Angeles and beyond.<sup>132</sup>

Much like James Hargett's call for Black Power, many of these Christian responses to the social upheavals of the late-1960s emphasized the positive aspects of cultural pluralism, the value of community, and the primacy of the neighborhood and congregation as a site of political action. After the relative failure of ambitious efforts on the part of ecumenical Christians to influence regional planning in Los Angeles, the thrust of the social witness of the churches, Protestant and Catholic, turned to smaller-scale initiatives and community organizing, activities which came to fruition in the 1970s and became an important feature of the so-called "decade of the neighborhood" of the 1970s.

From the vantage point of the evolving ecumenical Christian social thought of the period, however, there was more to the devolutionary, pluralistic turn of the churches in Los Angeles than simply a reaction to the social upheavals of the late-1960s, or an embrace of secular identity politics. Theologically, historian Gary Dorrien has pointed out that the period after Vatican II, among both Catholic and ecumenical Protestant churches, witnessed the "disruption" of liberationist social thought and an "eruption of repressed and excluded voices."<sup>133</sup> By the early-1970s, Latin American theologians, such

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<sup>132</sup> The links between Christianity and Black Power have recently garnered scholarly attention. See Matthew Cressler, *From Conversion to Revolution: The Rise of Black Catholic Chicago* (forthcoming). In cities such as Chicago, the proximity of Catholic parishes to the black community, and the presence of numerous black Catholics, led to an interesting mix of Catholic and black activism in the period. In Los Angeles, however, most of discourse on Black Power emerged from black Protestant congregations.

<sup>133</sup> For Dorrien's discussion of the liberationist turn in Christian social thought, see Gary Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making: Interpreting an American Tradition* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 390ff.



as the Peruvian Catholic priest Gustavo Gutierrez, were arguing vociferously for Christians to embrace a radical project of liberating the poor from oppression, while African American theologians, most notably James Cone, argued on somewhat similar grounds for black spiritual emancipation.<sup>134</sup>

But it was not only in academic circles that this diverse, liberationist strand of Christian social thought developed, but in cities such as Los Angeles as well. At the intersection of theological and urban change in the post-civil rights era, a social Christianity “from below” emerged that represented both a continuation of, and a departure from, the main contours of postwar social Christianity which held sway through the mid-1960s. This grassroots form of social Christianity not only drew on older notions of subsidiarity and communitarianism to engage the urban public square, but also pushed at the moral boundaries of Christianity itself with its insistence on the empowerment of the marginalized, broadly conceived, from racial and ethnic minorities to gay Christians. This turn toward the margins, economic and social, had profound implications not only for the trajectory of social Christianity’s thought and practice, but for the continued development of urban dignitarian politics as well.

This “rising down” of social Christianity in the post-civil rights era in Los Angeles is the subject of this chapter. In order to assess the scope and impact of this turn within the churches, it surveys organizations and movements that are not often discussed

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The quotation appears on page 4 of the introduction and frames Dorrien’s larger claims about the movement.

<sup>134</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1971), 49-78; James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1970), 1-129.

together, from Latino Catholic community organizers in East Los Angeles, to African American church activists in South L.A., to churches and organizations geared toward gay Christians, such as the Metropolitan Community Church and Dignity. Different as these groups were, denominationally, racially, and in socioeconomic terms, they embodied the “eruption” of repressed Christian voices that was characteristic of this period, when social Christianity continued to transform itself in the urban space of Los Angeles.

Although the people, movements, and developments described here were complex and multifaceted, they collectively make historically visible patterns of Christian social engagement that deeply affected the social fabric of Los Angeles in the post-civil rights era. They privileged the dignity not only of marginalized individuals, but sought to empower entire communities to exercise their political and civil rights, as well as their Christian faith. Moreover, they often deployed strategies to give a “voice to the voiceless” and to push back against perceived injustices, both within their respective churches and in the larger public sphere, in the process often making visible, as in the case of gay Christians, entirely new ways of being Christian in the modern world.

But the accomplishments of this strand of grassroots social Christianity in Los Angeles are ultimately not as vital to a robust understanding of urban dignitarian politics as is the manner in which they went about accomplishing them. In the struggle to provide avenues of religious and civic empowerment to marginalized communities, social Christians relied on a distinct set of principles that helped shape the political culture of post-civil rights Los Angeles. These principles, including Catholic notions of

subsidiarity and an ecumenical Christian acceptance of pluralism, as well as an distinctively African American style of communitarian and racial empowerment, were combined in many cases with more radical, liberationist currents of theological reflection and social witness during the period. Together, these modes of Christian praxis helped shape the contours of post-civil rights era social Christianity in Los Angeles, setting it on a course with enduring effects.

### **Black Churches: From Black Power to Political Clout**

Rev. James Hargett's call for African American Christians to embrace Black Power was not simply a spontaneous embrace of black militancy in the heat of the long, hot summers of the late-1960s. Rather, it illustrated a broader movement among African American Christians to develop new forms of theology that would speak directly to the black experience, spiritually and politically. In October of 1968, a group of black clergy and seminarians, among them James Hargett, met at Los Angeles' Holman United Methodist Church with the task of discussing this possibility of developing a new black theology. Hargett stressed that the goal of black theology would not be to separate itself from the larger traditions of Christianity, but rather to bring the black experience to bear on Christian theological reflection, especially the distinctive concerns of African Americans around issues of freedom and equality, as well as its long-standing commitment to political engagement. Moreover, Hargett stressed that black theology could have a salutary effect on white Christianity, which was mired, in his view, in pietistic practices that were inherently individualistic and apolitical. Although Hargett

and the assembled group at Holman United Methodist sought to dialogue with white Christians, its message to the white churches was to be thoroughly prophetic, speaking the truth of the black experience of marginalization to white believers.<sup>135</sup>

For Hargett, this new black theology would necessarily be about power, which led in his mind to an organic relationship with more militant voices in the African American community. As Hargett conceived it, the potentially unifying force of collective black theological expression could bring power to bear on white power structures both inside and outside the churches, disrupting the tendency of Christianity to impose social control on docile believers. The group ended its meeting with plans to create a center in Los Angeles that would study the possible alliances that might be developed among the black churches and the militant strain of black politics in Los Angeles of the time.

James Hargett's vision of a revolutionary black Christianity ran just slightly ahead of what would become a full-fledged movement of black liberationist theology and practice beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the following decade. The links between this strand of black theology and more radical expressions of black politics were many and varied. Indeed, black activists of the time, both inside and outside the black church, embraced the potential power of a politically-engaged Christianity, while seeking to undermine the religion's historical connection with racism. It was no accident, therefore, that activist James Forman famously delivered his Black Manifesto, which demanded that \$500 million in reparations be paid by whites to the black community, to Riverside Church in New York. If black power were to have any meaning, it seemed, it

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<sup>135</sup> See, once again, "Rev. Hargett at Watts Meeting," *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), Apr 13, 1967, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/564862493?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

would need to advocate for that power at the heart of the established Christian churches of the nation.

The intellectual currents of black liberation also found their way into the theological academy, primarily through the work of the theologian James Cone. In 1969, Cone published *Black Theology and Black Power*, a sustained reflection on the need for African Americans, and all Christian believers, to fundamentally reimagine their image of God. For Cone, the Christian God was not an abstraction, but rather an actor in human history who identified with the oppressed and marginalized. More importantly, Cone's image of God was one that embraced historical particularity over traditional claims of Christian universalism. Just as God had chosen the Israelite people for liberation from Egyptian captivity, so too did God in the present age choose African Americans for deliverance from the legacies of slavery and racism in America.<sup>136</sup>

Cone's emphasis on theological particularity, racial identity, and community-building would have an immediate impact on progressive black clergy and congregations, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, as would the continued unfolding of black political consciousness in the 1970s. Even Second Baptist Church's Thomas Kilgore, schooled in Niebuhrian realism by the master himself and a veteran of an earlier phase of the civil rights movement, would come to define his ministry and his church's mission in terms the historical particularities of the black experience in a way that rhymed significantly the approach of Cone.

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<sup>136</sup> This is adapted from James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 1-28, and informed by Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, 396-410.

Kilgore's speeches and sermons from the late-1960s and early-1970s are filled with vivid illustrations of the role that black Christianity could play in the wider ambit of global Christian faith. In a speech he delivered to the NAACP Convention in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1969, Kilgore outlined his vision of a "relevant" black church, one that could draw from the experience of the black community to speak truth to power. He argued that, in the midst of continuing racial strife, the Vietnam War, and entrenched poverty, the black church should stand steadfast as a witness to social justice and the continuing relevance of Christian belief in the face of the challenges of secularism and modernity.<sup>137</sup> More than Cone, however, Kilgore's vision of black Christianity remained firmly rooted in pragmatic concerns of community development, economic opportunity, and the concrete alleviation of poverty in black neighborhoods. Because he was the pastor of an urban African American congregation, Kilgore kept the tangible needs of his urban flock very much in view.

Kilgore's fusion of black Christian identity and concrete concern for urban issues would come to define not only his church's social engagement in Los Angeles in the 1970s, but in many ways that of progressive black congregations in the city more generally. In time, especially with the election of Tom Bradley as Los Angeles' mayor in 1973, who came to office in no small measure through the efforts of African American ministers such as Kilgore, black churches were able to leverage their political influence to effect real change in the African American community. Nevertheless, entrenched problems remained, so much so that in 1974, Malcolm Boyd, who had written

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<sup>137</sup> See "Toward a Relevant Black Church," included in Thomas Kilgore Jr. and Jini Kilgore Ross, *A Servant's Journey: The Life and Work of Thomas Kilgore* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 150-155.

extensively about Watts in the pages of the *Christian Century* in the aftermath of the riots, returned to find the neighborhood little changed, in his view.

In Los Angeles in the 1970s, African American churches faced a growing sense that the efforts to improve the lot of communities such as Watts were failing. Bishop H.H. Brookins, the pastor of the First A.M.E. Church in Los Angeles who was also instrumental in Tom Bradley's mayoral campaign and a close advisor in Bradley's administration, sounded a bleak note in an interview from 1975:

Some black people have got businesses; some people have gotten into significant jobs. But if you talk about the masses or that guy who was in trouble in '65, it is more difficult now. The majority of people are worse off today than they were in '65. In South-Central Los Angeles there is deterioration on every corner. Education has become a nightmare. People are afraid everywhere for their very lives.<sup>138</sup>

Much like Roman Catholics would in the largely Latino Eastside of Los Angeles, black Christians sought to organize on the congregation and neighborhood-level throughout the 1970s in order to achieve social change. One of the primary ways that progressive black congregations did this, as the 1970s wore on, was to establish two groups of influential ministers and community leaders to press for the needs of the African American community. One was known as The Gathering, while the other was called the Black Agenda, although each had an overlapping membership, including Thomas Kilgore.

The Gathering and the Black Agenda were the culmination of a period of social engagement by the black churches that reached back into the days of James Hargett's call

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<sup>138</sup> See John Kendall, "A Ghetto is Slow to Die," *Los Angeles Times* (March 23, 1975), B1.

to blend Black Power with Christian faith. Through these organizations, black congregations put into practice Kilgore's vision of a "relevant" black Christianity that could speak to the concrete social problems of the community.

The Gathering was organized by Kilgore and 131 mostly African American pastors in 1979, and formally launched in 1980 with an event at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles called "A Festival of Faith-Spiritual Mobilization," where it received an initial grant of \$26,000 to fund community organizing efforts in South Los Angeles. Almost immediately, the Gathering would take on a prophetic role in the community, especially around the role of police brutality in the city.<sup>139</sup>

The death of an African American woman, Eulia Love, at the hands of the LAPD in 1979 had deeply angered the African American community in Los Angeles. One of the Gathering's first formal actions was to press the demands of the community on the LAPD and its notorious police chief, Darryl Gates. Led by Rev. Milton Merriweather of New Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, described by observers as the most "feisty" member of the Gathering, the group succeeded in concrete changes to the LAPD police manual, including the elimination of the chokehold and stricter guidelines for the use of deadly force. Other actions ensued, including demands by the Gathering that an African American fill a seat on the Los Angeles school board that had been vacated by Diane Watson, herself an African American who had left to run for state senate.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> See Kilgore, *A Servant's Journey*, 98.

<sup>140</sup> See L.C. Fortenberry, "What Makes 'the Gathering' Tick?" *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), Apr 17, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/565293002?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).



While the Gathering was conceived as an ecumenical and interdenominational organization, it remained primarily concerned with the needs of the black community in Los Angeles. The Black Agenda, also founded by Kilgore in 1979 and consisting of many of the same ministers and their congregations, was even more explicit in its goal of pressing for a set of specific demands that would benefit African American Angelenos, calling for greater economic development, community empowerment, and racial unity.

Although the Black Agenda's activities mainly consisted of conducting community forums on issues of community development and housing, it was explicit in its call for black liberation from oppressive societal structures and economic disempowerment. Moreover, it called for the black community to rise up from the grassroots to attack its persistent problems because, as the group's founding document stated, "no one can save us but us." In the 1960s, a similar document coming from the progressive black churches might have turned its prophetic gaze to the white churches as sharers in the burdens of social justice and Christian witness. In the more liberationist 1970s, however, such calls were no longer forthcoming, speaking to the fragmentation of the ecumenical Christian social vision that had emerged, however haltingly, in the immediate postwar decades.<sup>141</sup>

To some extent, this development reflected change in the mainstream, non-black churches in the post-civil rights era in Los Angeles. In particular, the Catholic Church, whose progressive wing had been relatively active in African American civil rights efforts in Los Angeles through the 1960s, increasingly found itself concerned with fate of

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<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, 99.

members of its own flock on the Latino Eastside, where a distinctive strand of social Christianity would develop in the 1970s.

### **Refounding the Latino Metropolis**

The movement of social Christianity into a deeper engagement with issues of race, identity, and community was nowhere more apparent than in East Los Angeles, where an emerging theological emphasis on the plight of the poor overlapped with a rise in Latino racial identity and political consciousness.<sup>142</sup> Beginning in the late-1960s, churches in the barrios of East Los Angeles helped develop a distinctive strand of political and religious activism, most notably in the founding of the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO), which belatedly brought the IAF model of community organizing to the Catholic parishes of the Eastside and fused it with a sensibility drawn from Latin American liberation theology.<sup>143</sup> Among Catholic parishes, these changes were relatively slow in coming, however, as the Church under Cardinal McIntyre was opposed to organizing models based on the teachings of Saul Alinsky. In many ways, Latino religious activism was incubated in mainline Protestant churches on the Eastside, especially the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, where the militant Chicano

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<sup>142</sup> The literature on Latino Los Angeles is vast. Perhaps the most important text is George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford Press, 1995).

<sup>143</sup> For an overview of the IAF model of community organizing, see Aaron Schutz and Mike Miller, eds., *People Power: The Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 17-42.

organization, the Brown Berets, had first organized in the late-1960s. Oliver Garver, pastor of Epiphany at the time, was a strong supporter of the Latino civil rights agenda, lending his moral authority to causes such as the UFW and La Raza and working to establish a host of community organizations on the Eastside.

Catholics, especially clergy, who were sympathetic to the UFW and the Chicano movement did find outlets for their political and spiritual concerns. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, the importance of the relationship of the churches and the UFW to the development of social Christianity in Los Angeles cannot be overstated. The mainline Protestant-backed California Migrant Ministry, led by Rev. Chris Hartmire, was instrumental in Cesar Chavez's organizing efforts in the California's Central Valley, as was the emergence, somewhat late in coming, of the Catholic Church as an ally in the farm worker movement. Contact with the UFW on the part of clergy and other religious activists often became the seedbed of the push into church-based community organizing in the 1970s, as many came back to Los Angeles with organizing skills and training that they put to work in various Los Angeles communities.<sup>144</sup>

When clergy and Catholic women religious returned to urban ministry in Latino neighborhoods in the 1970s, they did so at a time in which, as they were in the African American churches, liberationist currents were coursing through Catholic theology, especially the new liberation theology of the Church in Latin America. Although Catholic liberation theology is most closely associated with the Peruvian "slum priest" Gustavo Gutierrez, whose 1971 book, *A Theology of Liberation*, had popularized the

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<sup>144</sup> See Alan J. Watt, *Farm Workers and the Churches: The Movement in California and Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 67-114.

term, “preferential option for the poor,” the theological praxis outlined by Gutierrez had long been fermenting with Latin American Catholicism.<sup>145</sup> In fact, in writing what became a classic text of liberation theology, Gutierrez was responding to the direction charted by the Catholic bishops of Latin America in their seminal document which they produced after a meeting of bishops in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968.

The so-called “Medellin Document” outlined a Christian social vision which was, its authors believed, in line with the modernizing direction of the Second Vatican Council, which had encouraged local formulations of its basic teaching on social justice and the mission of the Church in the contemporary world.<sup>146</sup> The Latin American bishops argued that the primary mission of the Church in Latin America was to provide a word of hope to those who “hunger and thirst after justice” and to seek to transform the structures of society to be more equitable and just. The document went on to stress the theme of liberation, in which a striving humanity searched for new ways to instantiate love, justice, and the end to all forms of oppression. Even more pointedly, the document asserted that one of the most crucial arenas in which justice was to be sought was in the realm of the equitable distribution of goods and the social function of property.

Much of the teaching of the Medellin document reflected a freshening up of older Catholic notions about the role of property in maintaining the common, rather than the individual, good. However, the Latin American bishops took this traditional teaching a step further in arguing that the role of the Church must be one of “conscientization” of

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<sup>145</sup> See note 4, above.

<sup>146</sup> An English translation of the document may be found at <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/medjust.htm>.

ordinary people, especially the poor, so that they might analyze their social situation, recognize injustices, and struggle for social change.

This method of empowering the Catholic grassroots would come in time to be known, in a simplified form, as “see, judge, act.” In other words, it called for the observation of social reality in the light of Christian faith, a judgment as to whether a given social situation conformed to the demands of justice, and if not, to act vigorously to change those structures so as to achieve liberation from oppression. In this deceptively simple method lay the seeds of a revolution in Catholic thought and social practice, one that would have ripple effects throughout mainstream Christianity globally.<sup>147</sup>

When the IAF-affiliated organization UNO came to being in Los Angeles in the mid-1970s, it entered into a Latino Catholic world that was in the process of being remade, both by increased immigration from Latin America, and by the new theological developments emanating from that region. Saul Alinsky’s method of community organizing, moreover, dovetailed perfectly with the method and outlook of Latin American liberation theology, as it too required the concrete identification of social issues and the development of solidarity and discipline in order to change existing structures. Many of the activities of UNO and its leaders would reflect this fascinating overlap of Alinsky’s method and that of liberation theology, often to powerful effect.

The synchronicity of the IAF’s strategies and the methods of liberation theology was not completely coincidental. Alinsky’s so-called “rules for radicals,” like liberation

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<sup>147</sup> The “see, judge, act” model was adapted, especially in latin America, in response to the teaching of Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* (1961), paragraph 236. Strikingly, this document was widely rejected by conservative American Catholics of the time, most notably William F. Buckley, Jr.

theology, placed the struggle for human dignity at the center of its concern, perhaps owing to Alinsky's friendship and correspondence with Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher who influenced the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>148</sup> Both Alinsky and the Latin American bishops at Medellin defined dignity, implicitly and explicitly, along the lines of the empowerment of ordinary citizens over and against unjust political, economic, and social arrangements.

But before this fertile confluence of IAF-style organizing and liberation theology could occur, significant hurdles had to be cleared in order for UNO to exist at all. The Catholic leader most responsible for the establishment of the United Neighborhood Organization in East Los Angeles in 1977 was Bishop Juan Arzube. Ordained as an auxiliary bishop in 1972 by Cardinal McIntyre's successor as the Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles, Timothy Manning, Arzube had taken an unlikely route to the hierarchy of the Church. Born in Ecuador, Arzube had made his way to Los Angeles for work in a correspondence school, only to find that he was called to the priesthood. As a new priest, Arzube worked primarily in the growing Latino neighborhoods of East Los Angeles, as well as in Ascension parish, in the heart of South Central, where he was pastor through the mid-1960s, witnessing first hand the tumult of the urban crisis.<sup>149</sup>

As a bishop, Arzube quickly became involved with the burgeoning movement of Chicano Catholic activism and identity, which drew inspiration from Cesar Chavez and

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<sup>148</sup> See Bernard E. Doering, *The Philosopher and the Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>149</sup> For details of Arzube's biography, see Francis J. Weber, "Bishop Arzube's Path to Hierarchy Traced." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), May 06, 1972, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/157015827?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

the UFW's struggle for farm workers' rights. Despite the involvement of a range of religious leaders in the UFW's organizing efforts, replicating an IAF-style community organization in Catholic Los Angeles had proved difficult under the conservative leadership of Cardinal McIntyre. Under the more progressive Cardinal Manning, however, new opportunities quickly emerged. In 1975, Arzube traveled to San Antonio, where he attended a meeting of COPS-- Communities Organized for Public Service-- a community organization with roots in the large Latino Catholic community of that city. While there, Arzube witnessed the power of ordinary people confronting political leadership over a host of issues, and returned to Los Angeles. As he later recalled, "I became enthused. There was no violence. It was well-organized...I thought it would be wonderful if we could do this in East Los Angeles." Upon his return to Los Angeles, Arzube quickly set about establishing the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO), modeled on the IAF model that COPS also employed.<sup>150</sup>

The relationship with the IAF was both by necessity and design. Arzube rightly recognized that the geographic sprawl of East Los Angeles, encompassing at the time some quarter of a million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans and numerous municipalities, would pose extraordinary problems to would-be community organizers, despite the fact that, as early UNO leader Ralph Mungia noted, "spiritually, economically and socially, East L.A. is one community, divided by artificial boundaries."<sup>151</sup> After

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<sup>150</sup> This account is adapted from Frank Del Olmo, "Community Coalition Mobilizing East L. A." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Dec 26, 1977, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/158424653?accountid=7418> (accessed April 13, 2015).

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

consulting with a group of Catholic priests serving in East Los Angeles, Arzube appealed to the IAF, which had been successful in helping to establish COPS in San Antonio. With the help of a \$60,000 grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and with the support Catholic and Protestant clergy in the area, UNO was born, but the difficult task of getting the organization up and running had just begun.

UNO hired Ernie Cortes to be its first lead organizer, an IAF veteran from San Antonio who had established COPS among the Latino churches of that city.<sup>152</sup> Cortes quickly set about employing the IAF method of conducting interviews in the congregations and identifying potential community leaders. Father Pedro Villaroya, pastor of Our Lady of Talpa parish in Boyle Heights and UNO's first president, remarked that "one quality we looked for was anger," when looking for leaders. He went on, "Anger in the positive sense-- a person who was concerned and anxious enough to do something about it." Methodically, Cortes gathered a cohort of leaders and the cooperation of 20 churches, mainly Catholic, but including several Protestant churches as well.<sup>153</sup>

In rapid fashion, UNO became a major player in East Los Angeles, applying pressure on city and regional officials on behalf of the needs of the community. UNO's first major campaign was a fight against the high auto insurance rates that were being charged to residents of East Los Angeles. In January of 1977, UNO organized a group of

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<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of Cortes' early history as an organizer and the founding of COPS in San Antonio, see David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 210-256.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*



more than a thousand citizens to demand action by the Board of Supervisors to lower the insurance rates, which were by far the highest in the state of California. At the time, it was reported to be the largest crowd ever to attend such a meeting, speaking to the organizational power of the still-new group. A second meeting followed in May, 1977 with a State Senate subcommittee on insurance and financial institutions which had an even larger turnout of around 2,000 “angry, but orderly” citizens of East Los Angeles, once again organized by UNO. By November of that same year, UNO had succeeded in pressuring insurers to substantially cut their auto insurance rates in East Los Angeles by using a different system for determining premiums. George Josephs, president of the Mercury Casualty Company, a major auto insurer at the time, made the announcement to an “emotional” crowd of UNO members in an auditorium at East Los Angeles College. In its very first action, and on an issue that had been identified by UNO as the most pressing in the community, UNO had emerged victorious, with politicians and journalists quickly taking note of the political clout of the group.<sup>154</sup>

By far the most important leader, and one who led the initial campaign against the auto insurers, was Luis Olivares, who would go on to become a highly-visible, activist presence in Los Angeles in the late-1970s and 1980s. Olivares was a Catholic priest and a member of the Claretian religious order, which had long been focused on urban ministry and direct service to the poor. Olivares took inspiration from his order, but reworked its set of concerns around a new set of possibilities in the era of the UFW and

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<sup>154</sup> See Lee Harris, “2,000 Protest High Auto Insurance Rates.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 07, 1977, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/158286007?accountid=14707> (accessed April 18, 2015) and Bruce Keppel, “1,000 Protest East L.A. Insurance Fees.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 26, 1977, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/158219520?accountid=14707> (accessed April 18, 2015).

the more radical social engagement of Latin American Catholicism. In the 1980s, he would go on to become one of the most vocal religious activists in the city, as will be discussed later in this project.<sup>155</sup>

UNO's activities would continue into the 1980s and beyond, but its legacy in the "decade of the neighborhood" of the 1970s remains crucial to an understanding of the development of a strand of social Christianity that sought to manifest the politics of dignity in churches, communities, and neighborhoods.<sup>156</sup> Much like African Americans in the same period, Latino Catholics sought to create solidarity, and did so in ways that tended to rely on racial and religious homogeneity. This emphasis on the part of black and Latino churches would lead to conflict, despite their theological and pragmatic similarities.

### **Bridges and Walls**

However, the 1970s emphasis of the churches on addressing social problems through racial, congregational, and neighborhood solidarity faltered, to a degree, as neighborhoods and congregations began to experience significant demographic shifts. Watts, long the heart of African American Los Angeles, was by the beginning of the 1980s becoming a very different kind of neighborhood, drawing the attention of many

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<sup>155</sup> Olivares' activism in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s is detailed in Mario T. Garcia, *Catholicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 207-248.

<sup>156</sup> I take the term "decade of the neighborhood" from Suleiman Osman's essay of the same title in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2008, 106-127.

observers at the time. Specifically, Watts was becoming visibly more Mexican, as an influx of immigrants, many of them undocumented, in the 1970s rapidly changed the racial and religious character of the neighborhood.

Racial tensions emerged that made the work of church-based organizers more difficult. As the Rev. Larry Jackson, head of a group of black clergymen in Watts who collectively worked to address problems of policing in the community, noted the challenges in an 1980 interview, pointing out that “I’ve been trying to recruit some of [the immigrants] to our church to open some form of communication. But it seems that most of the Hispanics moving in don’t want to be bothered to talk to anyone.” Even Catholic leaders in the community, who would seem to have an advantage in reaching out to the largely Catholic immigrant population, decried the lack of participation in organizing efforts. Rev. Javier Iturri, also in a 1980 interview, lamented what he perceived as a general sense of political and civic apathy on the part of the immigrant population, claiming that they were focused, unsurprisingly, on finding work and establishing themselves in the United States.<sup>157</sup>

While these observers of the shifting demographics of Watts displayed a regrettable lack of understanding of the lived realities of undocumented Mexican immigrants, they nevertheless underlined the shortcomings of community and congregation-based organizing models that relied on religious and racial solidarity to build a social movement. Secular activists, then and now, have often pointed out the

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<sup>157</sup> All of the quotations are from Marita Hernandez and Scott Austin. “Latino Influx,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Aug 24, 1980, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/162901147?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

problems of forging “black-brown” alliances in Los Angeles and it is clear that religious differences also played a crucial role in these challenges.<sup>158</sup>

The South-Central Organizing Committee (SCOC) represented a serious attempt to bridge the increasingly diverse religious and racial communities of the large area of Los Angeles that included Watts. Based on the model and example of UNO, SCOC was founded in 1981 by 12 Catholic parishes in South-Central Los Angeles with the goal of beginning to “finally address some of the questions which were asked, but never answered, in the aftermath of the Watts riots.”<sup>159</sup> These included united action on a range of issues, from the escalation of crime in the community, to rampant drug use and the persistence of entrenched poverty. Although it was established among the Catholic parishes in the area which were largely Latino, it set out to build relationships and credibility across racial and denominational lines, and with good reason, as the neighborhoods that it served at the time were overwhelmingly black and Protestant. Unlike UNO, which could rely on the solidarity of the relatively racially homogenous Eastside, SCOC had no such advantage in building its community organizing structures. In time, these limitations would prove to be just that, as SCOC struggled to convince skeptical African American congregations to take part in the organization.

Sister Diane Donoghue, a Catholic nun and veteran organizer from her days working with the Greater University Parish (GUP) in mid-city, was nevertheless optimistic in the SCOC’s early days, remarking that the organization was never intended

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<sup>158</sup> Laura Polito, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11-33.

<sup>159</sup> Marita Hernandez, “Blacks, Latinos Pledge United Front in South Central L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, (Feb. 2, 1981), C1.

to remain primarily Catholic. However, the organization soon encountered a deep vein of ambivalence among both Protestant black clergy and congregants in the community. The growing tensions in the area between blacks and Latinos over the scarcity of jobs and decent housing spilled over into a resistance on the part of both groups to work with one another, even for a common set of causes. Thomas Kilgore, who at the time was the leader of the group of black ministers known as The Gathering, argued that his organization was much better suited to addressing the needs of the black community than the SCOC ever would be. Kilgore did sound a note of cautious optimism about the SCOC, envisioning a future in which the paths of the black churches and Catholic parishes would cross, if never actually meet.<sup>160</sup>

The divisions that emerged over the founding of the SCOC were not only based on racial and religious differences, however, but spoke to a fundamental divide in tactics and strategy between the black churches and the IAF-inspired Catholic community organizations. In 1981, Cecil Murray, the pastor of the influential First AME Church, was more enthusiastic than Kilgore over the prospects of the SCOC, but wondered aloud whether African Americans, who were used to their ministers taking the lead on social activism, would respond to the Catholic community organizing model that emphasized the training of lay leadership.<sup>161</sup>

By 1983, many of these predictions had come true, forcing the SCOC to find different partners for its political agenda. Unsurprisingly, the SCOC found a natural ally

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<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*

in UNO, which shared its IAF affiliation and, just as importantly, its largely Latino Catholic composition. At a large rally at the Shrine Auditorium in November of 1983, several thousand members of both UNO and the SCOC to agree to join forces in what they called a “covenant” relationship. Diana Tarango, then president of UNO, argued that South-Central Los Angeles and the vast Eastside, despite their spatial distance, shared common goals and aspirations. The covenant arrangement provided a framework for the two organizations to work together jointly for the good of each community, multiplying their power and forcing the political and business leadership of the city to take notice.<sup>162</sup>

With a shared organizing heritage and Catholic religious identity, UNO and the SCOC framed their new partnership in explicitly religious terms. The theme for the rally was “From Bondage to the Promised Land,” with speakers drawing parallels between the biblical story from Exodus and the escape of the Israelite people from slavery and the stark realities facing the two communities in 1980s Los Angeles, including crime, inadequate educational opportunities, and an aging housing stock. Nevertheless, despite the festive atmosphere surrounding the new covenant relationship between UNO and the SCOC, their partnership also underlined the headwinds that the SCOC faced in attempting to organize in a community that did not broadly share either its tactics or its religious affiliation. While UNO and the SCOC were able to press on the levers of power on behalf of their collective neighborhoods, which together represented a huge swath of the Los Angeles Basin, forging solidarity closer to home proved elusive.

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<sup>162</sup> Edward J. Boyer, “Groups Rally in Drive to Increase Political Clout,” *Los Angeles Times*, (Nov. 13, 1983), C3.

Nevertheless, as the SCOC got off the ground in the early-1980s, it was able to cobble together interracial and interdenominational coalitions around certain issues, most notably crime. In 1984, the SCOC unveiled its “Jericho Plan,” which sought to break down the “walls” of crime in South-Central in the same way that the biblical figure of Joshua did with the walls of Jericho. Spurred on by their victory over the liquor stores, the member congregations of the SCOC decided on a even more ambitious agenda to not only reduce crime in South-Central, but also to attract industry back into the community and to improve the quality of life for the area’s residents.<sup>163</sup>

The Jericho Plan called for coordination among six different institutions: business, city government, law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, and of course, churches. The SCOC made explicit connections between the forces of deindustrialization and the rise in crime, arguing before Mayor Bradley that if industry returned to South-Central, crime rates would drop. Moreover, the SCOC demanded that the mayor increase police presence in the community in order to calm the nerves of uneasy business executives who would be hesitant to relocate to a crime-ridden area of the city.

The Jericho Plan was launched amid the backdrop of the rapid expansion of downtown Los Angeles in the 1980s, during which time a host of new skyscrapers and business development had altered the city’s skyline and attracted corporate tenants back to what had been a declining area of the city. The SCOC argued that the same could be done in South-Central, and took meetings with the head of several major corporations, including Arco and the Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, to argue the case for the

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<sup>163</sup> The account of the Jericho Plan is adapted from Chico Carresoual Norwood, “SCOC Unveils Jericho Plan to Fight Crime.” *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005), May 31, 1984, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/565412158?accountid=7418> (accessed April 18, 2015).

redevelopment of the area. Nevertheless, despite the reported success of the meetings between corporate leaders and the SCOC, businesses did not move back into South-Central in any number, as the area became increasingly associated with the gang violence that marked much of the history of 1980s Los Angeles.<sup>164</sup>

The SCOC fared moderately better with Bradley, who tentatively agreed to increase policing in South-Central and to use his considerable political muscle to push for greater recognition of the Jericho Plan on a state and even national level. Change, however, was slow to come to South-Central Los Angeles, as the area continued to face enormous challenges regarding policing, crime, gang violence, and a deteriorating business infrastructure. Despite repeated call on the part of the SCOC and allied organizations on the plight of the area, the city and the world would only truly take notice of the community, as it had in 1965, when fire once again came to South-Central in 1992.

Despite numerous attempts to build cross-racial alliances among church-based community organizations, successes were rare, with many black congregations opting to remain primarily connected to one another through clergy-led organizations such as The Gathering and the Black Agenda. Although it is difficult to identify a single primary cause for the failure of church-based, black-Latino alliances, it is most likely the result of the combination of historical religious differences, divergent leadership styles, and the more complex ways in which race and class are embedded in, and shaped by, American religious institutions. Whatever the ultimate cause, this relative failure among various

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<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*



Christian churches to effectively unite across denominational and racial lines remains one of the fundamental lost opportunities of this otherwise deeply ecumenical period.

### **Dignity and the Gay Christian in Los Angeles**

The “repressed voices” of African Americans and Latinos were not the only ones to be heard in post-civil rights Los Angeles. Although it may seem counterintuitive to discuss the emergence of a distinctively gay Christianity together with the organizing efforts of black and Latino churches, these manifestations of social Christianity shared in the liberationist turn in theology and Christian social witness in the 1970s. Moreover, the history of gay Christian churches and organizations of Los Angeles highlights the ways in which this liberationist turn was in no way limited to racial minorities, but touched on communities far from the streets of South-Central or the Eastside. In parallel with the Christian activists in other parts of the city, gay Christians in Los Angeles set about to organize on behalf of dignity, as so form a crucial part of the development of urban dignitarian politics.

Gay Christians, long deemed sinful by traditional Christian morality, also pioneered new ways of expressing their faith and promoting a broad gay rights agenda, even in the midst of resistance within the churches that often outstripped the hostility of the larger community.<sup>165</sup> In many respects, gay Christian practice in Los Angeles was at the vanguard of theological reflection over sexuality, gender, and the moral authority of

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<sup>165</sup> See Anthony M. Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press), forthcoming.

Christian tradition. In academic circles, gay liberation theology has only in more recent decades come to the fore, in response to the numerous ways that gay Christianity blossomed in the late-1960s onward in congregations and organizations dedicated to serving the needs of the gay Christian community, most often in major urban centers such as Los Angeles.

Nevertheless, larger questions of gender, sexuality, and authority were stirring in the mainstream churches by the late-1960s, mostly through the development of feminist theology which shared many theological assumptions with the black and Latin American liberation theology of the time. In 1968, while on the faculty of Boston College, the theologian Mary Daly published *The Church and the Second Sex*, its title a riff off of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), and one of the first works of overtly feminist theology to emerge from a (then) Catholic. It began with a call-to-arms: "Those engaged in the struggle for the equality of the sexes have often seen the Catholic Church as an enemy. This view is to a large extent justified."<sup>166</sup> Daly went on to assail the patriarchal structures of the Catholic Church, which were not only embodied in its male hierarchy, but also embedded in its foundational beliefs and practices. Moreover, Daly accused the Church of acting as a political "pressure group" that used its substantial influence in the defense of oppressive gender norms and lamented that many Catholic women implicitly condoned the Church's actions by passively accepting its teaching. Daly's work caused a furious reaction from conservative Catholics, but she was

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<sup>166</sup> Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1968, 53-73.

ultimately granted tenure at Jesuit-run Boston College, despite formally leaving the Catholic Church and dedicating herself to a “post-Christian” version of feminist theology.

Although Daly only discussed homosexuality in passing in *The Church and the Second Sex*, gay Christians of the time read her work with great interest, no doubt seeing the parallels between her deconstruction of patriarchal, heterosexist structures in the Church and their own subordinate position in the same hierarchies.<sup>167</sup> Yet, even if a theological openness to homosexuality was in embryonic form, at the grassroots, new churches and Christian organizations were being established that would place the question of sexual identity and authority at the very heart of their Christian praxis. Two such organizations, Dignity and the Metropolitan Community Church, took root in the gay community of Los Angeles in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Together, they stand alongside the efforts of African Americans and Latinos in the same period as a manifestation of social Christianity “from below.”

For many years, Los Angeles was notorious in the gay community for the zeal with which the LAPD harassed patrons of gay bars and clubs, so much so that progressive churches began to take notice by the 1950s.<sup>168</sup> Los Angeles’ First Unitarian Church, for example, ran education programs in the 1950s, instructing gay parishioners on what to say, and what not to say, to the police should they be arrested. Nevertheless, the predominantly conservative religious culture of the city through mid-century meant that churches was more often than not viewed as antagonistic to Los Angeles’ gay

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<sup>167</sup> References to Daly and her work appear frequently in the archival material of both MCC and Dignity, especially in the early years of each group.

<sup>168</sup> See Stuart Timmons and Lillian Faderman, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 162.

community. In San Francisco in 1964, an interfaith group known as the Council on Religion and the Homosexual was established with the express purpose of forming church leaders who would oppose discrimination against homosexuals, with the hope that where the churches went, law enforcement would follow. No such efforts were made in Los Angeles, however, and for many years, gay Christians were left to check their sexuality at the door of their church, if they attended at all. The fortunes of gay Christians, and Los Angeles' gay community in general, began to change for the better by the late-1960s, as the sexual revolution and the concerted efforts of gay activists began to pay dividends.<sup>169</sup>

The origins of Dignity lie at a fascinating intersection of progressive Catholicism and the Southern California counterculture of the late-1960s and early 1970s.<sup>170</sup> An Augustinian priest and practicing psychologist, Father Patrick Nidorf, began a ministry in San Diego for what he determined was a growing and underserved community within the Church, namely, gay Catholics. As a Catholic psychologist, Nidorf frequently encountered gay Catholics who were torn by questions of their sexual identity and their Catholic faith, which condemned, then and now, homosexual practices. Placing an advertisement in the *Los Angeles Free Press*, a countercultural newspaper, Nidorf set strict guidelines on admission to the first meetings of the group, for fear of “fanatics” or “homophobes” disrupting the proceedings. Those interested in joining Dignity were required to submit an application, together with a small fee, and some were even asked to

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<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> The following account is reconstructed from the historical notes on the founding of Dignity, found at: <https://www.dignityusa.org/history>, as well as from my immersion in the Dignity records at ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archive, Los Angeles.

participate in an interview with Nidorf, in order to weed out anyone who might attend under false pretenses.

Finding that the majority of his respondents were drawn from the Los Angeles area, Nidorf began holding meetings there, choosing the name “Dignity” for the group because, as he later put it, “one of our basic goals was to bring dignity into the spiritual and social lives of some very special people.” Continuing to advertise in the *Los Angeles Free Press* and, later, *The Advocate*, Dignity’s membership grew rapidly, and Nidorf and his close associates set about the task of drawing up official constitutions for the organization in May of 1970.<sup>171</sup>

Dignity’s “Statement of Position and Purpose,” made clear the connections the group saw between their efforts and those of other Catholics committed to the cause of social justice after the Second Vatican Council. “As Catholics and members of society,” Dignity’s members proclaimed, “we involve ourselves in those actions that bring the love of Christ to others and provide the basis of social reform in the Church and society.” The group’s founders also made explicit how they shared this mission, most especially, with the cause of feminism, declaring, “We strive to eradicate sexism and patriarchy in all areas of the Church and secular life, so that women are wholly included, accepted and welcome.”<sup>172</sup> In setting out their agenda, the founders of Dignity made common cause with theological voices in the Church, such as Mary Daly’s, that envisioned the

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<sup>171</sup> See, once again, the historical notes, as in note 38.

<sup>172</sup> The text is from <https://www.dignityusa.org/purpose>, accessed on April 18, 2015.

overturning of patriarchy in the Church as the most salient cause in the fight for social justice and striking a similarly liberationist tone.

However, it was Dignity's twin commitment to the cause of gay rights and the reform of the Church itself that would prove most controversial to Catholic authorities. Dignity made its central mission not only the eradication of patriarchy, but a wholesale reimagining of the Catholic Church's moral position on homosexuality. Dignity's founders argued that homosexuality, contrary to Church teaching, was "consonant" with Christian faith and the teaching of Jesus Christ. Moreover, Dignity asserted that this fundamental consonance of Christianity and homosexuality extended to homosexual sex as well, and that sexual relationships between gay partners could be just as "unitive" as heterosexual marriages.

Despite the fact that Dignity would eventually run afoul of Catholic Church authorities in Los Angeles, in the 1970s it was initially welcomed into the Church, as the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council opened up new possibilities of more overtly progressive social witness among Catholics. As Dignity grew in membership in Los Angeles, it also began a rapid expansion in other cities across the country, with new chapters opening in quick succession in Louisville, New York, and Boston, to name only a few. The various Dignity chapters were active participants in numerous meetings of socially progressive Catholics, during which the group's input was sought in how the Church could better serve the gay Catholic population. Dignity's increasingly high profile in Catholic social justice circles even led to several declarations by the National Federation of Priests Councils (NFPC) in support of Dignity's core mission, culminating

in 1974 when the NFPC issued a statement on the “Civil Rights of Homosexual Persons,” in which the assembled Catholic clergy vowed “its opposition to all civil laws which make consensual homosexual acts between adults a crime and urges their repeal.”<sup>173</sup>

In 1976, representatives from Dignity were invited to participate in the Call to Action Conference of the U.S. Catholic bishops, a gathering of numerous Catholics engaged in social justice ministries. The conference, which was called in order to set out social priorities for the U.S. Church for the coming five years, adopted a strikingly progressive tone with regard to homosexuals, at least in Catholic terms, promising to work toward overturning structures of anti-gay discrimination and for greater equality for gays in the areas of housing and immigration. Moreover, the Call to Action Conference wholeheartedly endorsed Dignity as a vital Catholic organization, and encouraged local bishops and lay Catholics to work together with the group in order to “reconcile the Church with its homosexual[s].”<sup>174</sup>

As will be discussed in a later chapter, the remarkable openness of the Catholic Church to Dignity and its pro-gay agenda in its early years would not last, as an increasingly socially-conservative hierarchy grew uncomfortable with the group’s challenge to traditional Catholic sexual morality. Forged at the liberationist grassroots in Los Angeles, Dignity enjoyed a brief moment of wide acceptance in an institutional Church wrestling with the seismic shifts in sexual thought and practice after the 1960s.

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<sup>173</sup> See note 38.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

Although Dignity emerged in Los Angeles, its focus from the beginning was on reforming structures and policies within the Catholic Church, though it also devoted significant energies toward reforming civil structures on behalf of gay Angelenos. The Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), on the other hand, was deeply involved with civic issues and the cause of gay rights from its inception in Los Angeles in 1968.

MCC, founded by Rev. Troy Perry, a Pentecostal minister expelled from his congregation in Tennessee because of his sexuality, grew out of Perry's encounter with Los Angeles' gay rights movement in the late-1960s. After a friend of Perry's was arrested after a police raid on a gay bar known as the Patch in 1968, Perry had what he called an "epiphany" that led him to once again take up his role as a Christian minister and start a church for gay believers. MCC's first congregation expanded rapidly, with a congregation of over 900 just four years after its founding and affiliated churches multiplying around the Los Angeles area and across the country.<sup>175</sup>

From the beginning, Perry's intention in founding MCC was both religious and political as he set forth an ambitious social agenda for his new flock. Notably, Perry modeled MCC's social witness on progressive black congregations, and based his church's push for gay civil rights on that of the civil rights movement and the strains of black liberationist social thought. Like black congregations, Perry and MCC saw their mission as essentially prophetic, if non-partisan. R. Adam DeBaugh, MCC's Social Action chair in 1975, summed up the church's social witness as "serv[ing] in a prophetic role politically, speaking the truth as we are led to understand it about the social issues

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<sup>175</sup> See Timmons and Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 259ff. and John Dart, "Growing Homosexual Churches Aid Many," *Los Angeles Times* (Feb 14, 1973), 24.



close to us.” Just as many black and Latino Christians fought for their rights on the grounds of a theologically-inflected sense of identity and community empowerment, so too did MCC see itself and speaking primarily to, and on behalf of, the gay community.

In 1978, Troy Perry was one of many gay activists across California who were instrumental in mobilizing opposition to Proposition 6, the so-called “Briggs Initiative,” that would have banned openly gay schoolteachers from working in the state’s public schools.<sup>176</sup> Despite these gains in the political arena, Perry and the MCC would find it much more difficult, as Dignity would, to press its agenda of reform to the wider body of Christian churches. Although MCC applied for membership in the National Council of Churches as early as 1974, its repeated attempts at full membership were repeatedly denied on the grounds that its teaching on homosexuality was incompatible with the sexual morality of the other member churches.

The overturning of the patriarchal hierarchies that marginalized gay Christians was an extraordinarily difficult task in the 1970s, as Mary Daly would have undoubtedly agreed. Nevertheless, the 1970s were at time in which the mainstream churches, for a time at least, began to rethink their traditional objections to homosexuality and the presence of gay Christians in their midst. Yet, the currents of a more liberationist gay theology and Christian practice were largely confined, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, to churches and church-affiliated organizations that put the issue of homosexual identity at the forefront of their social Christian witness. Like Latino community organizers and black Christian activists, gay Christians in Los Angeles in the post-civil rights era

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<sup>176</sup> See “Gay Rights Movement Gains Momentum in L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times* (March 19, 1978), C1.

provided a “voice for the voiceless,” but also like them, the question remained whether the city and the other churches were listening.

### **Conclusion: The Little Platoons of Social Christianity**

The post-civil rights era was a crossroads for both social Christianity and Los Angeles. Social Christianity continued its evolution, as the currents of liberation theology-- black, Latin American, and gay (among others)-- began to circulate in the city, enabling the appearance of innovative models of church communities and new avenues of Christian social witness.

Yet, the time of liberation in the larger Christian community was also one of unforeseen consequences and the foreclosure of certain possibilities for broader solidarities. In the aftermath of Watts and the King years, black churches cut a path through the 1970s that took them from an brief, though important, encounter with black power, to a more pragmatic phase in which the concrete needs of the community and the “black agenda” rose in prominence. For Catholics, the relationship between community organizing and Latin American liberation theology provided a new form of social witness that deeply impacted the barrios of the Eastside of Los Angeles, while for gay Christians, Catholic and Protestant, the 1970s opened up the possibility, perhaps for the first time, of practicing both their faith and their sexuality openly.

Yet, these diverse strands of social Christianity, though in many ways united theologically, remained stubbornly separate in practice. In part, this was the consequence of long-standing and historically-conditioned barriers between Catholic and Protestant, black and brown, straight and gay. Moreover, as was especially the case with the relative lack of community organizing efforts that cut across racial and creedal lines, it reflected the seemingly intractable divisions bound up with race, segregation, and cultural differences.

However, there is also a way in which these divisions were the product of post-1960s Christian social thought itself. In his recent book, *The Age of Fracture*, historian Daniel Rodgers has argued that the postwar period, and especially the 1970s, witnessed a shift from more “macro” understandings of social life to ones that were more atomized.<sup>177</sup> Christian social thought in this period reflected that shift of understanding, with the earlier, universal ambitions surrounding human dignity giving way to more modest expressions of the same principle, expressing themselves in congregations, neighborhoods, and community organizations, rather than in the city at large.

Seen in another light, however, the “rising down” of the social Christianity of the 1970s was part of a larger grappling among mainstream Christian churches with questions of identity, pluralism and diversity in an urban context, both within their own ranks, and in the world at large. Despite its genuine limitations, social Christianity, expressed across a multiplicity of denominations, races, and sexual orientations, provided a voice within both the churches and the city of Los Angeles for a host of marginalized

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<sup>177</sup> See Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2011, 180ff.

communities. In turn, these “eruptions” of repressed voices altered the trajectory, in meaningful ways, not only of communities and neighborhoods within Los Angeles, but of postwar Christianity itself.

Moreover, the events depicted in this chapter are only a sliver of the story of social Christianity’s wrestling with the realities of pluralism and diversity. Always a highly diverse city, racially and religiously, Los Angeles and its churches would soon witness the effects of the post-1965 immigration wave that rapidly transformed the religious demographics of the city and the racial and ethnic composition of its worshipping communities. The ways in which the mainstream churches navigated this rapidly changing urban landscape are the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### **No Strangers Among Us: Social Christianity, Diversity, and Pluralism in Post-1965 Los Angeles**

In November of 1969, representatives from various mainline Protestant churches, together with several Catholic priests and Jewish rabbis, came together to create a new organization, the Interreligious Council of Southern California (IRC-SC).<sup>178</sup> The group's purpose was to provide a forum for leaders across faith traditions to engage one another in dialogue about issues of mutual concern, on a local, national, and international level. Many of the organization's founding members had grown concerned over the parochial nature of the social witness of churches and synagogues, with mainline Protestants devoting much of their energy at the time to antiwar activism and Catholics focused on issues of abortion and sexual morality in the waning days of Cardinal McIntyre's leadership of the archdiocese.<sup>179</sup> For their part, Jewish groups were concerned primarily with issues relating to Israel and its fractious relationship with the Arab world. While the IRC-SC did not propose to mute the genuine social concerns of the various religious

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<sup>178</sup> John Dart. "First Top-Echelon Interfaith Council Organized in L. A." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 04, 1970, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/156554965?accountid=7418> (accessed April 28, 2015).

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

groups, the founders hoped that a broader social vision could emerge from a process of shared dialogue and mutual exchange.

While the initial goals of the IRC-SC were modest, the fact that such an array of religious leaders were meeting at all was historic.<sup>180</sup> During Cardinal McIntyre's long tenure as the Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles, little progress had been made in forming ecumenical and interfaith initiatives that involved the top leadership of the Church, despite grassroots efforts that had coalesced around issues of fair housing and civil rights in the 1960s.<sup>181</sup> In 1970, McIntyre retired as archbishop and was replaced by the more moderate Timothy Manning, who was far more open to cooperating with other religious leaders on a range of civic issues. The full participation of the Catholic Church was a crucial step in the growth of the IRC-SC, which in a few years time would admit representatives from Buddhist temples, the local Vedanta Society, and the Baha'i tradition, as well as other groups.<sup>182</sup>

The establishment of the IRC-SC was only one example of the broader turn of mainstream Christian churches to issues of ecumenism and religious pluralism in the postwar decades, but most especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had cleared the way for the Catholic Church to more fully engage with other Christian

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<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> In church matters, McIntyre was a staunch traditionalist, and generally had little sympathy for ecumenical or interreligious efforts in his archdiocese.

<sup>182</sup> John Dart, "Baha'is Accepted by Interfaith Council." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Apr 03, 1976, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/157896494?accountid=7418> (accessed April 28, 2015).

churches and with faith traditions other than Christianity.<sup>183</sup> Mainline Protestant churches had long been committed to ecumenical activity, but they too grappled with issues of pluralism and diversity in new ways, beginning in the 1960s.<sup>184</sup> This deeper engagement of the mainstream churches with the ramifications of ecumenism and pluralism was global in scope, involving international church bodies such as the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, and the influence of theological currents emanating from parts of the world where Christians were a decided minority, most notably Asia.<sup>185</sup> As the mainstream Christian churches and their leaders became increasingly aware of Christianity as a global faith, questions about the role of Christian faith in a pluralistic world moved to the forefront of their theological reflection and social concern.

However, an important dimension of the encounter of the mainstream Christian churches with a diverse and increasingly pluralistic world is the manner in which this engagement developed locally and within specific contexts that challenged the churches in distinctive ways. Los Angeles had long been known for its racial, ethnic, and religious diversity, but after the immigration reform of 1965 brought thousands of immigrants from Latin America and Asia to the city, the city was transformed, as were its

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<sup>183</sup> For an overview of these developments, see John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 15-52.

<sup>184</sup> For an overview of the liberal Protestant encounter with diversity, see Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1997. For a comparable Catholic work, see David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

<sup>185</sup> see Kinnamon and Cope, 247-249.

churches.<sup>186</sup> Despite the persistence of racial and economic segregation in the city, many of Los Angeles' neighborhoods changed dramatically after 1965, especially through the rapid rise of the city's Spanish-speaking population which was no longer confined to its longtime home on the Eastside. As centers of community life, churches often found themselves on the frontlines of demographic change which brought with it both opportunities and immense challenges.

These developments not only brought Christian churches and their leaders into relationship with representatives from other faiths, but also involved a grappling with racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity *within* the churches, as new immigrant groups and changing neighborhoods brought rapid change to congregations across the city. Demographic change in the churches, and in the racial and ethnic composition of the city at large, led the churches in Los Angeles to build interreligious coalitions such as the IRC-SC, and also to pioneer new ways to minister to immigrant groups in culturally-specific ways. Moreover, many individual congregations in Los Angeles remade their social outreach to correspond with the changing urban landscape outside of the church walls, resulting in ministries in which the traditional dividing lines of race, language, and even denomination became increasingly porous.

The multifaceted encounter of the churches with diversity and pluralism in Los Angeles after 1965 is the subject of this chapter. Much like earlier developments in postwar Christian social policy, the distinctive ways that the churches dealt with a rapidly changing city were deeply rooted in broader developments in mainstream Christian social

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<sup>186</sup> Over two million immigrants arrived in the Los Angeles area during the 1970s alone. Actual numbers are unreliable, however, because of the substantial number of undocumented immigrants who arrived at the same time. The actual number is likely far higher.



thought, especially regarding religious pluralism and cultural diversity. But the events described here were also rooted in the urban context of post-1965 Los Angeles, as the city became a laboratory of sorts for evolving notions of a global, multicultural Christian community. If Los Angeles was transformed by demographic change after 1965, so too were many of its thousands of church communities.

### **A Global Encounter**

At the Second Vatican Council, among the many new pronouncements on Catholic doctrine was the influential document, *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Time”), a declaration concerning the relationship of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions.<sup>187</sup> The declaration is justly famous for its repudiation of Christian antisemitism and for its wider embrace of Christianity’s Jewish roots. As historian John Connelly has recently noted, *Nostra Aetate* was a true watershed, largely the result of the diligent efforts of European Jewish converts to Catholicism to change traditional Church teaching concerning Jewish culpability in the death of Christ, a teaching which had at least partially inspired countless acts of violence against Jews throughout the centuries.<sup>188</sup>

In an American context, however, this message of reconciliation between Christians and Jews was not entirely new, as national organizations such as the American

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<sup>187</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html).

<sup>188</sup> John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 239–272.

Jewish Committee and the National Conference of Christians and Jews had been working for many years to build constructive relationships between the Christian churches and the Jewish community.<sup>189</sup> In Los Angeles, for example, the American Jewish Committee's Los Angeles chapter had forged meaningful relationships with both mainline Protestants and Catholics in the 1950s, and even joined together with the Jesuit-run Loyola University to sponsor an annual Human Relations Workshop to promote religious, racial, and ethnic tolerance in the city.

However, what was new about *Nostra Aetate* was that it went beyond calls for tolerance and mutual understanding between Christianity and Judaism, and instead actively encouraged Catholics to engage in substantive dialogue with Jews on common concerns of “peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”<sup>190</sup> Even further, the declaration encouraged this same dialogue with Muslims and other non-Christian believers, recognizing the dignity of all people and common human search for meaning that transcended religious divides.<sup>191</sup>

*Nostra Aetate* was only the most noteworthy example of a significant shift in mainstream Christian thought regarding religious pluralism that emerged after the Second World War, although there were earlier examples.<sup>192</sup> The ecumenical Protestant churches were particularly invested in changing traditional Christian notions of exceptionalism and

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<sup>189</sup> see Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Protestants and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29-35.

<sup>190</sup> Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement*, 400.

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*

universalism that excluded non-Christians from any hope of salvation.<sup>193</sup> Furthermore, ecumenical Protestants made interreligious dialogue a priority of their postwar social witness, especially after the 1960s, recognizing the urgent need for Christians to engage with the world's non-Christian religions for the sake of peace and the struggle for justice, especially in the developing world.<sup>194</sup>

Stanley Samartha, an Indian theologian and ordained minister of the Church of South India (part of the Anglican Communion), was one of the most active figures in promoting interreligious dialogue in the global arena.<sup>195</sup> As director of the World Council of Churches (WCC) committee on dialogue in the 1970s, Samartha argued forcefully that religion more often than not served as a barrier to building up human community, especially in multi-religious societies such as India. Therefore, Samartha encouraged his fellow Christians to dialogue with people of all faiths, in order to cut through the “walls of separation” between different religions. Far from watering down Christian faith, Samartha believed that such a spirit of interreligious dialogue was authentically Christian, as it reminded Christians of their true mission of “building up a truly universal community of freedom and love.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Christian theology on the issue of salvation is extraordinarily complex. In general, mainline Protestants have somewhat relaxed their teachings on Christian exclusivism, while the Catholic Church takes a more subtle position, arguing for the dignity of other faiths, while maintaining that Catholicism represents the fullness of God's promises of salvation.

<sup>194</sup> Kinnamon and Cope, 406.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, 407.

*Nostra Aetate* and the promotion of interreligious dialogue by ecumenical

Protestants represented not only new Christian understandings of the faith in the light of a pluralistic, religiously-diverse world, but also a deepening awareness among the churches that Christianity was becoming a truly global faith. Important Christian voices were emerging from the developing world, many of whom were deeply attuned, as Samartha was, of the ways Christianity would need to adapt to a society in which Christian faith could not be taken for granted. Just as significantly, Christians from the developing world pointed toward the growing diversity within the Christian churches themselves, in which the Eurocentric assumptions of the past would need to give way to a richer sense of cultural pluralism and a diversity of Christian practice.<sup>197</sup>

The encounter of mainstream churches with diversity and pluralism was not only global, but multidirectional, as it influenced church policy and practice with regard to other religions, as well as the relationship of the churches to their own members, especially those from outside of Europe and North America. This complex reorientation of Christian social thought occurred on the global stage, with important developments arising at the Second Vatican Council and in numerous WCC gatherings. Just as crucially, however, it also happened locally, nowhere more so than in the rapidly globalizing city of Los Angeles of the post-1965 era. Many of the issues that church bodies confronted regarding diversity and pluralism in a global context were the same ones that churches in Los Angeles faced as they navigated the a complex urban

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<sup>197</sup> For a historical overview of Christianity as a global faith, see Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Vol. 2* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).

landscape. The churches of Los Angeles had no need to seek out global Christianity in far away countries. It had arrived at their door.

### **The Civic Vision of Interreligious Dialogue**

After its establishment in 1969, the IRC-SC quickly expanded its membership beyond the Christian churches and Jewish groups to include the Islamic Foundation, which represented the majority of the Muslims in Southern California, as well as the Hindu Vedanta Society, the Buddhist Church Federation, the Sikh Brotherhood, and the Greek Orthodox Church, among other religious groups.<sup>198</sup> Meeting monthly with staff and office space provided by the American Jewish Committee and the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the group set out to engage in high-level dialogue about moral and political issues of common interest for the leaders of organized religion in the region. Observers at the time noted that it was the most inclusive and diverse interreligious organization in the country, far surpassing comparable efforts in other cities, undoubtedly owing to the extraordinary religious diversity of Southern California.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> John Dart, "Southland's Interreligious Council perhaps Broadest Group in U. S." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 14, 1973, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/157218141?accountid=7418> (accessed April 28, 2015).

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

The IRC-SC's activities often centered on educating the members about the multitude of faith traditions represented in the group. Meetings often rotated between the different religious organizations, providing an opportunity not only for interreligious dialogue, but for a deeper immersion in the practices of various traditions, with the goal of discovering, as one member put it, "the genuine values of each other."<sup>200</sup> The clergy and other religious leaders who comprised the group even took retreats together, to strengthen bonds of familiarity and respect and to facilitate greater cohesion within the organization.<sup>201</sup>

Dialogue and mutual understanding were not the only goals of the IRC-SC, however. The members of the group also sought to formulate an interreligious social vision that would speak to the common moral concerns of various religious organizations in Southern California. One of the first joint actions of the IRC-SC was a commitment among the members to support the charitable efforts of the United Way, an organization that was itself the product of an earlier era of interreligious cooperation.<sup>202</sup> The IRC-SC also lent its political and moral clout to practical, even mundane, issues affecting member institutions, including pressuring the State Division of Highways to spare the Vedanta

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<sup>200</sup> "Interreligious Council Supports United Way." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 19, 1972, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/157015017?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> see <http://www.unitedway.org/pages/history> (accessed April 30, 2015).

Society's temple from excessive traffic noise resulting from the planned widening of a freeway.<sup>203</sup>

Despite the rather modest mark that the IRC-SC made on the political scene in Los Angeles in the 1970s, the group was not without its detractors. Many conservative Christian congregations pointedly refused to join the group, including members of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Churches of Christ, which was the sponsoring church of Pepperdine University in Malibu.<sup>204</sup> Also rejecting an invitation to join the IRC-SC were the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), many African American congregations, and the Missouri Synod Lutherans.<sup>205</sup> When Rabbi Alfred Wolf, the first president of the IRC-SC, issued a Thanksgiving message in 1970 "in the name of the entire organized religious community," he was asked by a reporter whether or not the evangelical Christians of Los Angeles would agree with that. With a knowing smile, Wolf's fellow IRC-SC member, the Methodist bishop Gerald Kennedy, answered the reporter's query for him: "No, I don't think they would agree with that."<sup>206</sup>

The resistance of evangelical Christian churches to the IRC-SC highlighted the distance, religious and political, between conservative Christians and mainline Protestant

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<sup>203</sup> John Dart, "Southland's Interreligious Council perhaps Broadest Group in U. S." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 14, 1973, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/157218141?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

<sup>204</sup> See Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 326-361.

<sup>205</sup> John Dart, "Interreligious Council Still Far from Goal." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Nov 29, 1970, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/156547418?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*

denominations. Although the rift between these groups began in the nineteenth century with debates over biblical inerrancy and the theory of evolution, and deepened in the Social Gospel era of the early-twentieth century, it was rarely more pronounced than in the 1970s. At the time, many evangelical Christian churches were forging new alliances with the Republican Party and grassroots conservative political movements, especially in Southern California.<sup>207</sup> The Church of Christ's Pepperdine University, for example, was an important center for this amalgam of evangelical Christianity and conservative politics, providing intellectual and religious heft, as well as a cadre of dedicated students, to the cause of advancing a political agenda very different from that of the IRC-LA, focusing on "social issues" that included opposition to the sexual revolution and the expansion of the federal government.

Evangelical Christians of the period were committed to "Christianizing America" through the implementation of a conservative political agenda that stressed resistance to the liberalizing currents of American society, including reproductive rights, the growth of the federal government, and the banishment, as they saw it, of expressions of religious faith in the public square.<sup>208</sup> To this end, conservative Christians increasingly lent political and financial support to politicians who would advance a Christian agenda, through organizations such as Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority that emerged in the

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<sup>207</sup> see Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 81ff.

<sup>208</sup> The literature on evangelical politics is now vast. For an introduction, see Randall Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics and Beyond* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press), 2010.



late-1970s.<sup>209</sup> Although moral concerns were the most obvious feature of conservative Christian politics at the time, a broader discomfort with American pluralism also marked the movement of evangelicals into overt political advocacy. Fearful that the United States was rapidly losing its identity as a “Christian nation,” which they dubiously claimed had been the founding principle of the republic, conservative Christians mobilized politically in order to promote a civic vision that placed Christian morality at the center of national concern.<sup>210</sup>

Despite conservative Christian claims to speak on behalf of all Christians, many non-evangelical Christian churches took a very different approach to forging a moral civic vision in the period. In some sense, the model put forth by the IRC-SC, which stressed tolerance, dialogue, and mutual understanding among different religious groups was not so different from secular liberalism, which often made tolerance the most important social value. The proliferation of human relations commissions in many postwar cities, including Los Angeles, was a concrete example of the role that government institutions had long played in promoting a liberal, inclusive vision of American society that extended to issues of religious pluralism. In Los Angeles, mainstream Christian churches and the city’s large and politically-active Jewish

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<sup>209</sup> See Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 159-186.

<sup>210</sup> See Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 3-34.

community were often at the vanguard of these initiatives, lending moral and spiritual support to the social project of urban liberalism.<sup>211</sup>

Often overlooked in assessing the role of religious institutions in promoting tolerance of diverse groups are the explicitly religious dimensions of this type of social engagement. The global encounter of the Christian churches with pluralism and diversity within their own congregations and in the larger world played out on a local level, inspiring initiatives such as the IRC-SC that attempted to put into practice a theological vision that made room for people of other faiths. In Los Angeles, this resulted in the formulation of a strikingly different civic vision from the one promoted by evangelical Christians in the same city.

While the IRC-SC was never overtly partisan, it often made its political priorities well-known by engaging in advocacy on behalf of education, welfare, housing, and anti-poverty efforts, as well as providing educational resources for use in public schools in order to promote greater religious tolerance in Los Angeles.<sup>212</sup> The organization continued in this decidedly low-key capacity of coordinating charitable contributions, addressing issues of common concern to the religious community, and fostering a deeper awareness of Los Angeles' religious diversity throughout much of the 1970s. Although it never became a force for social change the way of more social-justice-oriented religious

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<sup>211</sup> In the 1950s, the American Jewish Committee's Los Angeles chapter, together with Loyola University of Los Angeles began this annual workshop on behalf of greater tolerance in the public square. An early "graduate" was a young LAPD officer and future mayor of the city, Tom Bradley.

<sup>212</sup> John Dart, "Southland's Interreligious Council perhaps Broadest Group in U. S." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Apr 14, 1973, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/157218141?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

organizations, it nevertheless provided a framework within which a very different social and religious vision from that of conservative Christians could thrive.

As the IRC-SC grew in size and influence, however, it did occasionally wade into more controversial political waters. In 1986, the organization promulgated a code of fair campaign practices code, aimed directly at conservative Christian candidates who explicitly invoked religion in order to garner political support. Moreover, the IRC-SC's campaign code called on political candidates to refrain from implicitly impugning an opponent's morality because of difference in religion, race, or ethnic identity. In publishing the code, the IRC-SC maintained that "universal beliefs" such as love, honesty and respect for life "predate[ed] the establishment of the Christian church," and should not be claimed as the special preserve of Christian politicians.<sup>213</sup>

The IRC-SC's campaign code, despite being couched in general terms, had a specific context in Southern California politics in the 1980s. In 1984, Rob Scribner, a lay minister of the evangelical Four Square Gospel Church, ran an unsuccessful campaign to unseat Mel Levine, the Democratic congressman from California's 27th District, which included the liberal bastion of Santa Monica.<sup>214</sup> A year later, a letter that Scribner had written to would-be supporters was made public, in which Scribner claimed that Levine was "diametrically opposed to everything the Lord's church stands for in this nation," citing his voting record that scored a zero on a conservative Christian "report card."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> John Dart, "Council Adopts Fair Campaigning Code." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Jul 05, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292370306?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*

The letter went on to suggest that conservative Christians unite to unseat Levine and “take territory for our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>216</sup> In 1986, Scriber was once again the Republican choice to run against Levine, and the IRC-SC was deeply concerned that he would once again resort to campaign tactics that evinced Christian triumphalism combined with a thinly-veiled anti-semitism.

Representatives of the IRC-SC, including those from the mainstream Christian churches, deplored Scriber’s invocation of Christian faith in order to unseat a Jewish opponent. They were even more concerned that Scribner’s tactics were becoming commonplace within the Christian Right, and made the decision to leverage their own religious influence to push back against political campaigns cloaked in the language of Christian faith. Not only did the members of the IRC-SC consider such tactics to be immoral, they also saw them as an existential threat to the civic vision that the organization was attempting to promote and which differed so starkly from that of Scribner and his conservative Christian allies. Rather than arguing for the United States as a Christian nation, the council instead suggested that the country’s truest principles were “religious and political liberty,” that was predicated on an acceptance of religious pluralism.<sup>217</sup>

The civic vision of the IRC-SC was an early manifestation of a changing religious and demographic climate in Los Angeles and across the country. Religious studies

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<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*

scholar Diana Eck has written about what she calls the “new religious America” that developed largely after the 1965 immigration reform brought thousands of new immigrants, and their religious faith, to the United States, significantly recasting the religious identity of the country.<sup>218</sup> The presence of a vast array of religious organizations in the IRC-SC, from Christians and Jews, to Buddhists and Hindus, highlight how much the religious fabric of Los Angeles was changing after 1965, especially with regard to non-Western religions. The early-Cold War emphasis on “Judeo-Christian” moral values could no longer be taken for granted after the 1960s, as Los Angeles and the rest of the nation grappled with a new, interreligious reality in which dialogue among diverse groups became vital to the liberal political project.

Although conservative Christians viewed religious pluralism with suspicion, many mainstream Christian denominations embraced it, as their active participation in the IRC-SC reveals. Moreover, the civic vision that the IRC-SC attempted to promote throughout the 1970s and 1980s had deep roots in the churches’ own encounter with pluralism, both globally and locally. In important respects, therefore, the interreligious social engagement of the IRC-SC was just as “Christian” as the conservative social witness of the evangelical churches of the same period. For many mainstream Christian churches, the best way to promote Christian values was to take seriously the contributions of people from other faiths, and to work together to promote social justice and the common good.

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<sup>218</sup> Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 26-79.

While the IRC-SC was conceived as an opportunity for the diverse religious leadership of Los Angeles to have a forum for mutual dialogue and social action, mainstream Christian churches also encountered issues of diversity and pluralism at the level of individual congregations and in Los Angeles' rapidly changing neighborhoods. These local encounters would prove to be just as important as the work of the IRC-SC in developing a Christian social vision that embraced the possibilities and challenges of an increasingly diverse city.

### **Changing Neighborhoods, Changing Churches**

In 1976, a number of churches in the Pico-Union neighborhood of Los Angeles united to form a group called Christian Action in Central City, in part to deal with the challenges associated with ministry to a diverse population. At the time, Pico-Union was transitioning from a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood to one with a growing number of Spanish-speaking immigrants from Central America.<sup>219</sup> Although the different groups shared a Latino identity and the Spanish language, the pastors of the churches grappled with tensions between the Mexican Americans and Central Americans in their respective congregations. One of the churches in the consortium, Angelica Lutheran Church, established an organization known as the School of the People to provide English-language courses, help with applying for citizenship, and tutoring for school children in the neighborhood as a practical way to break down barriers between

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<sup>219</sup> Russell Chandler, "Mixed Community Challenges Churches." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Nov 13, 1976, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/158065182?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

different groups and provide the basis for greater unity. Other efforts were even more pragmatic, including sponsoring sports teams for the youth in the community that cut across divisions of national origin and ethnicity.<sup>220</sup> In addition, worship services were offered in multiple languages, to both accommodate Spanish-speakers and help those who wished to learn English acculturate more effectively.<sup>221</sup>

The experience of the churches in Pico-Union were a microcosm of the wide-ranging project in Los Angeles' churches to respond to the demographic change of post-1965 Los Angeles. As community institutions, churches were on the frontlines of these changes, and struggled to deal with the problems of immigrant communities while continuing to minister to more established groups within their congregations.

By the 1980s, the kind of multicultural ministry pioneered by groups such as Christian Action in Central City had become the norm throughout much of Los Angeles. In 1986, in nearby Glendale, the Glendale Presbyterian Church was offering worship services in multiple languages, including Korean, Spanish, and English, alongside of Sunday school instruction in Portuguese, while a formerly all-white Methodist congregation in suburban La Canada Flintridge had been transformed by immigration from South Asia into a predominantly Gujarati-speaking church..<sup>222</sup> Rev. Eugene Golay, the director of the local Protestant church council in Glendale, estimated at the time that

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<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> Elizabeth Campos, "Anglo, Ethnic Congregations Coexist Churches Open Doors to Immigrant Groups." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Jan 23, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292217446?accountid=7418> (accessed April 30, 2015).

the number of churches in the area had doubled in just five years, as immigrant groups began their own congregations, even as many joined existing church communities.<sup>223</sup>

Church leaders at the time recognized that the future of their congregations resided with the new immigrant groups which were filling the pews of what had been declining and aging Anglo churches. Rev. W. Murray Gibbons, pastor of the North Glendale United Methodist Church, remarked in 1986 that he envisioned a time in which immigrant churches played a crucial role in the broader United Methodist Conference, owing largely to the large influx of Asian Christians into his church. However, he also noted the difficulty in bringing such a diverse array of ethnic groups together in one congregation, where the barriers of language, custom, and culture made forging a unified community exceedingly difficult.<sup>224</sup>

Congregants at other Los Angeles-area Protestant churches had similar experiences as those in Glendale. In the early-1980s, Rev. Delwin Thigpen, pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Alhambra, was faced with a rapidly-shrinking congregation that had been cut in half during the 1970s, part of larger trend among mainline Protestant churches whose white membership declined rapidly after the 1960s.<sup>225</sup> In 1985, First United Methodist Church was thriving, mostly because of the

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<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Elizabeth Lu "'I'm all for it. . . the Church is More Vital, More Alive Now.'-Church Enriched by its Ethnic Diversity." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Dec 01, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292264189?accountid=7418> (accessed April 30, 2015).



presence of a sizeable numbers of Korean and Chinese Methodists who arrived just as the church's white membership was reaching all-time lows.

In order to take advantage of the increasing numbers of immigrant Christians in his church, Thigpen and other church leaders developed a plan to merge with another Methodist congregation nearby and form multiple congregations within one church community. Each of the ethnic and language groups represented in the church had autonomy to conduct their own worship services and social events, while at the same time remaining under the overall leadership of Thigpen.<sup>226</sup> The plan was innovative, but met with at least some resistance from the older, English-speaking community, who occasionally complained about the pace of change in the church. Nevertheless, many also embraced the strategy of forming multiple communities within one church, recognizing the vitality that the new immigrants brought to what had been a moribund congregation.<sup>227</sup>

The ways in which mainline Protestant churches dealt with issues of pluralism and diversity in their congregations were not limited to ad hoc efforts on the local level. On the contrary, a great deal of pastoral and theological reflection occurred, especially in the 1980s, as students at prominent local divinity schools such as Claremont and Fuller Theological Seminary turned their attention to the challenge of multicultural ministry in the Los Angeles context. In 1987, for example, Hyo Shik Pai, a doctoral student in divinity at Fuller, devoted his research to a case study of the bilingual ministry of the

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<sup>226</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*

Korean Congregational Church of Los Angeles, taking note of both its practical benefits from the standpoint of ministry and its broader theological implications.<sup>228</sup> Pai argued persuasively that the use of both the Korean and English languages at the Korean Congregational Church had resulted in the rapid growth of the church, as it was better able to provide for the spiritual needs of recently-arrived immigrants from Korea, as well as those of an older, more assimilated group. However, Pai also made it clear that the move into bilingual ministry also had deeply religious roots, and cited biblical passages that enjoined the Christian churches to preach to all people in their native tongues.<sup>229</sup>

The encounter of mainline Protestant congregations with cultural diversity in Los Angeles was, therefore, inherently religious, and drew deeply from theological perspectives which had been long in the making. Historian David Hollinger has referred to the ecumenical Protestant embrace of diversity with an image drawn from the New Testament story of Pentecost, in which “cloven tongues of fire” came down from heaven, allowing the early Christians to speak in foreign languages to all whom they encountered.<sup>230</sup> In Los Angeles, this “Pentecost moment” unfolded in the rapidly changing neighborhoods and congregations of the post-1965 era, especially by the 1980s. Although not all mainline Christians would follow the lead of their clergy and theologians in adapting to the reality of an immigrant church embedded in a pluralistic

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<sup>228</sup> Hyo Shick Pai, “Korean Congregational Church of Los Angeles: The Bilingual Ministry and Its Impact on Church Growth (California).” Order No. 8720766, Fuller Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Program, 1987, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303653715?accountid=7418> (accessed April 30, 2015).

<sup>229</sup> *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>230</sup> David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18.

society, immigrants themselves did, and in doing so helped transform the churches of Los Angeles into a truly global communion.

### **An Immigrant Church**

Between 1970 and 1980, over one million immigrants arrived in Los Angeles County, many of them from Latin America and Asia.<sup>231</sup> Although exact numbers are difficult to determine, a great number of these new immigrants were Roman Catholic, hailing from traditionally-Catholic countries such as Mexico, the Philippines, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The influx of new immigrant groups into the Catholic Church in Los Angeles transformed a community that had largely been Anglo and Mexican American into a truly multicultural Church, reflecting in miniature the global scope of Catholicism itself. To effectively deal with the rapidly changing ethnic and racial composition of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Church made issues of immigration and cultural accommodation central to its mission, especially in the 1980s.

In 1985, Roger Mahony was named as Timothy Manning's successor as the Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles. As a young priest, Mahony had been deeply involved in the farm worker movement, marching with Cesar Chavez and assisting in efforts to certify the United Farm Workers (UFW) union, and later served as bishop of Fresno, the Catholic diocese which included the Central Valley agricultural region where

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<sup>231</sup> John Dart, "Catholics Urged to Welcome Immigrants Ethnic Groups Enrich Church Life, Mahony Says in Pastoral Letter." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Jan 04, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292217414?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

the UFW was born. Although the Catholic hierarchy had taken a more conservative turn after the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978, Mahony was considered a liberal, despite his career-long defense of traditional Catholic teaching on matters of sexual morality.<sup>232</sup> When Mahony returned home to Los Angeles to become archbishop, he quickly set about implementing a socially-progressive agenda that paid particular attention to immigrants and the needs of non-English-speaking Catholics.

Mahony's first pastoral letter as bishop was issued in January of 1986, just months after he had taken office. Titled, "A New Partnership," Mahony encouraged all Catholic in Los Angeles to welcome immigrants to the archdiocese and to recognize the gift that ethnic and racial diversity brought to the Catholic Church, proclaiming that there "are no strangers in the community of faith." In order to more fully accommodate immigrants into the archdiocese, Mahony mandated that his clergy become proficient in at least one foreign language, preferably Spanish, and further stipulated that individual parishes should do everything in their power to adapt the spiritual and social life of the community to better serve new immigrant groups.<sup>233</sup>

Mahony explicitly employed the Catholic notion of human dignity to make his appeal on behalf of immigrants, arguing that their right to worship in culturally-specific ways was rooted in "our faith vision of the human family, its unity, the dignity of every

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<sup>232</sup> See my discussion of Mahony and his contentious relationship with the gay Catholic organization, Dignity, in chapter 5.

<sup>233</sup> John Dart, "Catholics Urged to Welcome Immigrants Ethnic Groups Enrich Church Life, Mahony Says in Pastoral Letter." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Jan 04, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292217414?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

human person.”<sup>234</sup> For Mahony, recognizing the dignity of immigrants often meant experimenting with multilingual liturgies, as was the case in an Advent mass that he celebrated early in his tenure as archbishop in Van Nuys, in which prayers were offered in Korean, Spanish, and English.<sup>235</sup> In his pastoral letter, Mahony also highlighted similar efforts which were being made at Holy Innocents Catholic Church in Long Beach, which served a dizzyingly diverse array of Catholics from the Philippines, Guam, Samoa, South Korea, and Latin America.<sup>236</sup> With such ethnic and racial diversity within his flock, it is no wonder that Mahony declared, accurately, that “the world has arrived at the doorstep of each parish of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.”

The attention of the Catholic Church in Los Angeles to the related issues of immigration and cultural pluralism in the 1980s marked an important development in the ongoing evolution of mainstream Christian social thought and the dignitarian politics that emerged from it. Whereas notions of dignity had been employed in Catholic circles for decades around issues of labor and race, Mahony’s focus on multicultural concerns within his archdiocese was a reflection of the Catholic Church’s broader embrace of diversity within its ranks, both globally and locally. In many ways, the developments in Los Angeles were the natural outgrowth of the turn to vernacular languages in the liturgy after Vatican II, but Mahony’s social vision went beyond merely offering mass in different languages. Rather, Mahony argued for a multicultural Catholicism that both

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<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *ibid.*

accommodated and celebrated the cultural riches that new immigrant groups brought to the Church, remaking an institution that had long been dominated by European-American assumptions concerning the proper practice of the faith.<sup>237</sup>

This emphasis contrasted markedly with past Catholic practice in the United States, when new immigrant groups often formed their own “national parishes,” separate from the majority of Catholics. In the nineteenth century, for example, many Irish and German Catholic immigrants established their own churches, bringing with them their own clergy and continuing their practice of the faith apart from other Catholics in a given city.<sup>238</sup> Although this model persisted to some degree in Los Angeles, Mahony’s preferred model was strikingly different, in that he encouraged immigrant groups to become a full part of existing parish communities, even as they maintained their culturally-specific ways of being Catholic.

Although Mahony’s commitment to multicultural expressions of Catholicism was genuine, the majority of his social outreach in the 1980s involved Latinos, who were quickly becoming a majority within the Catholic Church in Los Angeles, with numbers ranging upwards of two million by the mid-1980s. Not long after Mahony issued his pastoral letter on immigration and diversity in 1986, he unveiled an ambitious plan to both serve the Spanish-speaking population more effectively within the Church and

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<sup>237</sup> For an overview of the changes wrought by Vatican II in Los Angeles Catholicism, see Colleen McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

<sup>238</sup> A fascinating introduction to this earlier period of immigrant Catholicism in the United States is Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

provide aid for a number of social justice initiatives that would have an impact in the broader Latino community.<sup>239</sup>

Dubbed the “Plan for Hispanic Ministry,” Mahony’s proposal set aside \$2 million for a range of new projects, from the pastoral to the social. Included in the plan were provisions for Spanish-language classes for clergy, a bolstering of bilingual education in Catholic schools, and an increase in scholarship money for Latino students, which provided greater access to Catholic high schools for children from economically-disadvantaged families. In addition, Mahony remade his staff to better serve the Latinos, hiring scores of new Spanish-speaking administrators to help implement his pastoral priorities.<sup>240</sup>

However, the aspects of the plan that dealt directly with social outreach in the Latino community were even more transformative of the Church’s mission in Los Angeles. Mahony set aside funds for the establishment of several shelters for immigrants throughout the archdiocese, as well as a task force which worked to oppose the eviction of undocumented immigrants from public housing. Mahony was particularly concerned about the latter issue, and vowed to register his “concern and disapproval” to federal officials on behalf of the undocumented.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Russell Chandler, "Mahony Unveils Broad Latino Aid Plan Social Activism, Evangelization Aimed at 2 Million in Archdiocese." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, May 28, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292275349?accountid=7418> (accessed April 29, 2015).

<sup>240</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Russell Chandler, "Mahony Unveils Broad Latino Aid Plan Social Activism, Evangelization Aimed at 2 Million in Archdiocese." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, May 28, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292275349?accountid=7418> (accessed April 30, 2015).

The plan's attention to issues of pressing social concern in the Latino community was not accidental. Mahony's proposals were part of a national effort on the part of the U.S. Catholic bishops in the 1980s to engage grassroots Latino organizations in formulating a comprehensive plan for outreach to the growing numbers of Spanish-speaking Catholics in the United States. Through a series of meetings with Latino community leaders across the country, the American bishops identified a number of areas in which the Catholic Church could do more to assist immigrants and provide better pastoral care for Spanish-speakers, including scholarship aid for Latinos to enroll in Catholic schools, as well as an increase in church-sponsored social services in Latino neighborhoods.<sup>242</sup>

In Los Angeles, Mahony enlisted the help of the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO), the church-based community organizers on the Eastside, to achieve the social goals of his plan.<sup>243</sup> Leaders from UNO were consulted extensively before the plan was announced, and were influential in developing its larger social vision that included concern for undocumented immigrants, as well as addressing the economic challenges faced by Latino students in the city.<sup>244</sup> Drawing from his experience working with the UFW, Mahony was far more open to working with grassroots organizations than his predecessors, leading directly to a plan that conformed to the concrete needs of the Latino community. In many ways, the "Plan for Hispanic Ministry" represented the

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<sup>242</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>244</sup> Chandler, "Mahony Unveils Broad Latino Aid Plan."



convergence of traditional, top-down approaches to social problems by the churches with the grassroots, congregation-based models that had been developing in Los Angeles since the 1960s.

The plan also fundamentally shifted the Catholic Church's social outreach to reflect the increasingly diverse populations within the archdiocese of Los Angeles. However, a central tension in the Catholic Church's encounter with diversity in the 1980s was the fact that, as the archdiocese welcomed immigrants from all parts of the world, it was also becoming a majority-Latino Church. While Mahony was careful to attend to the spiritual, cultural, and linguistic needs of his diverse flock, he also made it clear that the Church's priority, and indeed its future in Los Angeles, would be Spanish-speaking. Therefore, there is a sense in which the multicultural turn of the Church in the 1980s, while important, was also a stage on the way to the archdiocese becoming, as so many Catholic dioceses had throughout American history, a Church with a single, dominant ethnic population.<sup>245</sup>

Nevertheless, Mahony's outreach to immigrant populations in his archdiocese and his reframing of Catholic social priorities around the needs of the Latino community were vital to a robust understanding of social Christianity's broader engagement with post-1965 demographic change in Los Angeles. Although the Catholic Church had been a global institution for centuries, its multicultural identity had rarely been so evident on a local level as it was in Los Angeles, especially in the 1980s, when immigrant groups remade the Church in the city. Ultimately, Mahony's efforts were only a small part of the

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<sup>245</sup> Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* (New York: Verso, 2000), highlights the "Latin Americanization" of Los Angeles, 49-60.

dramatic changes that came to the Church in the period, parish by parish. Under the leadership of Cardinal McIntyre, the Church in Los Angeles had been known as a bastion of traditionalism and conservative politics, despite the significant presence of more socially-progressive groups at the grassroots. By the 1980s, the social witness of these groups had become central to the Church's mission in the multicultural metropolis of Los Angeles, marking a definitive break from an archdiocese that had once been derisively called "the Church of silence."<sup>246</sup>

## Conclusion

The commitment of mainstream churches to multicultural ministry, interreligious dialogue, and the needs of new immigrant populations in Los Angeles profoundly shaped the character of the churches' social witness after 1965. The influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia remade the churches and the city itself, providing the impetus for churches to reimagine their ministries and adapt to a changing demographic landscape. Moreover, this encounter with diversity and pluralism made manifest the emerging sense, shared across a range of Christian denominations, of Christianity as a global faith, and one that needed to divest itself of exclusivist claims in order to make its way in a pluralistic world.

Rooted, as was much of postwar Christian social thought and practice, in a fundamental recognition of the human dignity of all people, without regard to race,

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<sup>246</sup> See A. V. Krebs, Jr., "A Church of Silence," *Commonweal*, 80 (July 10, 1964), 467-76.

ethnicity, or religion, this embrace of pluralism allowed for the development of a civic vision that was interreligious and multicultural. In many ways, this vision was forged at the global level, as both the Catholic Church and the ecumenical Protestant churches came to strikingly similar conclusions about the place of Christianity in a globalized society. For these mainstream Christian churches, the future of Christianity was to be found in an ongoing dialogue with people of good will, in a shared struggle to find truth, meaning, and social justice in the contemporary world.

In Los Angeles, these developing understandings of Christianity allowed for the participation of mainstream churches in interreligious coalitions such as the IRC-SC which, while pursuing a fairly modest project of charitable and educational endeavors, also pushed back against the conservative political project of evangelical Christians. Moreover, the churches also demonstrated their embrace of pluralism within their own congregations, formulating new ways to minister to immigrant populations in a culturally-sensitive manner. Indeed, the presence of immigrant groups within the churches in Los Angeles, especially the Catholic Church, eventually led to a significant reshaping of the priorities of social Christianity writ large, as the needs of immigrant communities rose to the forefront of Christian social concern.

Multiculturalism, as both a theological concept and a civic vision, also had its limits. As historian David Hollinger has argued with regard to mainline Protestant denominations, the acceptance of diversity and pluralism in the churches challenged assumptions held by a good number of white Christians on issues of “race...nationality, and divinity,” that led, in part, to the declining influence of mainline churches among

many, white, middle-class Americans.<sup>247</sup> As with much of postwar social Christianity, the turn toward multiculturalism was led in large part by clergy, theologians, and church-based activists, and failed to engender broad support outside of this elite group.

Although this argument has merit when viewed from an American context, it overlooks the global dimensions of the turn toward pluralism and dialogue, and pays scant attention to millions of immigrant Christians in Los Angeles who were able to find a spiritual home in the city's churches because of multicultural ministry and the evolution of Christian social thought on issues of culture and identity. Of greater concern was the way that the churches' pluralistic vision tended to mask the racial and ethnic divides that were so prevalent in Los Angeles in the post-1965 period.

In many ways, the mainstream churches in Los Angeles played a key role in the larger multicultural political project of Mayor Tom Bradley. Throughout his administration, Bradley celebrated Los Angeles' multicultural identity and emergence as a global metropolis, and focused on the city's diversity as its greatest strength. In the 1980s, however, the fragile balance of multicultural politics in Los Angeles began to falter as a series of crises confronted the city, from AIDS to homelessness. For the churches, it would take more than an acceptance of pluralism to respond to these challenges, it would require prophetic action.

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<sup>247</sup> Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*, 18.

## Chapter 5

### Common Witness: Prophetic Christianity in 1980s Los Angeles

In the early 1980s, refugees from El Salvador's civil war began arriving in large numbers in Los Angeles, fleeing both political instability and the presence of government-sponsored death squads that were cracking down on dissidents, including a significant number of Catholic priests and nuns.<sup>248</sup> Although the Reagan administration refused to recognize these immigrants as political refugees, religious leaders--especially among mainline Protestants and Catholics (as well as Jewish groups)--recognized an urgent need to provide them with refuge from the harsh realities of political oppression in El Salvador. To this end, about forty churches in Los Angeles declared themselves sanctuaries for Central American refugees, as both a response to the humanitarian crises in the region and as an implicit rebuke of the Reagan administration's policies in Latin America.

One of the leaders of the Sanctuary Movement in 1980s Los Angeles was Father Luis Olivares, the veteran community organizer who had gained a reputation in the late-1970s as an indefatigable activist on behalf of the needs of the burgeoning Latino community on Los Angeles' Eastside. By the early-1980s, Olivares had become pastor of Los Angeles' oldest Catholic parish, La Placita Church in the old Mexican center of

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<sup>248</sup> The broad outlines of Olivares' role in the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles can be found in Mario T. Garcia, *Catholicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 207-250.

the city, and long the spiritual center of Mexican American Catholicism in the city. Under Olivares' leadership, the venerable parish became not only a Mexican American cultural center, but also a hub of prophetic activism on behalf of Central American refugees. Drawing lessons from his days as a community organizer, and steeped in the practice of Latin American liberation theology, Olivares spoke with an uncompromising--and controversial--voice on behalf of the many thousands of Central Americans who arrived in Los Angeles seeking shelter from war and poverty in their native countries. In time, Olivares became one of the most visible figures among religious leaders in Los Angeles on issues of social justice, but he was far from alone in his prophetic Christian witness in the 1980s.

The Central American refugee crisis was only one of many issues of the time that provoked a sharp moral response from religious leaders in the city. In Los Angeles in the 1980s, many church leaders and activists came together to address a series of moral and political issues, especially regarding homelessness, immigration, and the AIDS crisis, with a decidedly prophetic cast. In many ways, the prophetic politics of this period represented a culmination of the social thought and practice of the churches that had begun in the years after the Second World War, with a strong focus on the dignity and rights of marginalized populations. Moreover, the prophetic witness of the churches across a range of issues emerged from their broader encounter with diversity and pluralism in Los Angeles and the liberationist currents that deeply influenced church-based community organizations at the time.

In many respects, mainstream church leaders and activists managed to forge a “common witness” to the multiple crises besetting Los Angeles in the 1980s, providing a unified moral voice that had proved elusive in previous decades.<sup>249</sup> Although the postwar period witnessed a convergence of Catholic and mainline Protestant reflection on a broad number of issues, including civil rights, never before had mainstream Christians spoken with such unanimity about the urgent need to address such a variety of social concerns as they did in Los Angeles in the 1980s.

It is tempting to view the range of issues that churches engaged with in the 1980s as merely reactive, symbolic of the “crisis mentality” that had marked certain corners of Christian social witness since the 1960s, with no underlying unity of purpose or thought. This view is deeply misguided. The issues that concerned the churches in Los Angeles in the 1980s, among them immigrants’ rights, the AIDS crisis, and the growing numbers of homeless on the city’s streets, all touched on central concerns of postwar Christian social thought and policy. In the case of immigrants’ rights, for example, churches across the Catholic and Protestant divide had been advocating for the reform of U.S immigration policy since at least the 1950s, and had been developing new strategies to welcome immigrant groups into church communities in Los Angeles since the 1970s.<sup>250</sup> Far from being a collection of ad hoc responses to the crises of the 1980s, the prophetic politics of church leaders in the period sprang from the deep roots of postwar social Christianity.

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<sup>249</sup> I take the term “common witness” from the National Council of Churches, which uses the term to this day to describe areas of shared social concern of the churches.

<sup>250</sup> see chapter 4.

Nevertheless, the common witness and prophetic politics of the churches in this period were as much a denouement as a fulfillment of the promise of postwar social Christianity. In the aftermath of the 1992 riots, facing an altered political and economic landscape in Los Angeles, churches and church-based organizations turned increasingly toward public-private partnerships and other “neoliberal” forms of social engagement in the city, often with an emphasis on economic empowerment at the neighborhood-level.<sup>251</sup> This turn toward economic justice often meant that Christian leaders no longer spoke directly in the public square as they did so often, and with great power, in the 1980s. If the prophetic politics and practices of the churches in the 1980s proved fleeting, however, their influence on the social and political life of 1980s Los Angeles was of lasting significance.

### **The Church with AIDS**

By the mid-1980s, the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), which had grown both locally and nationally since its inception in the late-1960s, became an important center of religious responses to the AIDS crisis in Los Angeles. One of its initiatives was a “videotape ministry,” in which the church produced short films to educate its congregants about the disease, but also about its theological implications. The first video was titled, “AIDS: The Present Crisis,” which featured interviews with four AIDS patients discussing their experience of the disease in the light

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<sup>251</sup> see chapter 6.



of their Christian faith. In addition to its educational function, the video was meant to explicitly push back against the idea, circulating at the time in some fundamentalist Christian circles, that AIDS was a divine punishment for the sinful lifestyle of the gay community.<sup>252</sup>

Rev. Ken Martin, pastor of the MCC congregation in the San Fernando Valley, envisioned his larger role in the AIDS crisis as providing “theological sanity” to the issue, assuring congregants, especially those with AIDS, that God was not inflicting the disease on the community. On the contrary, Martin argued, if God were to judge anyone in the midst of the AIDS crisis, it would be those that did not respond compassionately to those in need, or made the suffering worse by ascribing a negative theological interpretation to homosexuality. Moreover, Martin worried that the AIDS crisis would hamper his church’s efforts to develop a pastoral and theological approach to gay Christians in which same-sex sexual relationships were seen as positive and fully in keeping with the Christian faith.<sup>253</sup>

MCC was not only on the frontlines of AIDS ministry in Los Angeles, but felt the effects of the disease among its own leadership. Rev. Steve Pieters was a minister of the North Hollywood MCC Church in 1985 when he learned that he was HIV-positive.<sup>254</sup> The son of a Presbyterian missionary to Korea, Pieters had felt alienated from organized

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<sup>252</sup> Patricia Ward Biederman. "Life Styles in Gay Community Tempered by Threat of AIDS." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 16, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154317621?accountid=7418> (accessed April 26, 2015).

<sup>253</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Patricia Ward Biederman. "AIDS-Stricken Pastor Clings to Faith." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 10, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154371563?accountid=7418> (accessed April 26, 2015).

religion in his youth, assuming that his sexuality was a barrier to his full participation in the Christian community. However, while trying to break into the theater world in Chicago in the 1970s, Pieters became involved the MCC congregation there, later entering the Presbyterian McCormick Theological Seminary to prepare for service as an ordained minister. He would later recall that he was the only openly gay student at the seminary, at a time when mainstream churches were only beginning to deal seriously with issues of sexuality, however haltingly.<sup>255</sup>

Apart from dealing with the personal shock of his diagnosis, Pieters immediately recognized that, as an MCC minister, he had an opportunity to be on the “cutting edge” of a new ministry in the Christian churches, and one in which the MCC would, by necessity, have to take the lead. In addition to participating in MCC’s videotape ministry, Pieters established an informal ministry over the phone, in which he would provide weekly pastoral care to about 40 congregants with AIDS, offering them solace and comfort, as well as the simple joy of shared conversation and laughter. But perhaps Pieters’ most “prophetic” action in the midst of the AIDS crisis was his continuing his ordinary ministry at the MCC in North Hollywood, as his presence in the congregation led to numerous opportunities to educate congregants about the disease, but even more importantly, to help MCC members work through the theological implications of the AIDS crisis.

Although the engagement of the MCC with the ramifications of the AIDS crisis were not nearly as politically-informed as those of secular activist groups such as ACT

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<sup>255</sup> *ibid.*

UP, the experience of predominantly gay congregations with the disease led directly to a broader theological assessment of homosexuality, especially among mainline Protestant churches. In 1985, the National Council of Churches (NCC), working in coordination with leaders of MCC, began a study group on the “Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community,” which included participants from the Catholic Church, as well as the major Protestant member churches of the NCC. The study group’s purpose was to reflect theologically on local church movements engaged in social justice work, and to that end, presentations were given on a range of topics, from economic justice concerns to developments in the liberation struggle in Latin America.<sup>256</sup>

It was MCC’s presentation on AIDS, however, that captured the study group’s attention, and this issue eventually became a lens through which the assembled theologians reflected on the nature of the Church in the contemporary world, a “Church with AIDS.”<sup>257</sup> Recognizing the increasing prevalence of persons with AIDS across the spectrum of Christian denominations, the group framed its reflection on the disease in a global context, noting that churches in such places as Central America, Africa, and the Philippines were actively grappling with the theological and pastoral implications of the health crisis. Moreover, the reflection group underlined the fact that issues of sexuality were some of the most divisive in the churches, and one of the major sticking points in broader theological reflection on the reality of diversity within the Christian faith as it

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<sup>256</sup> Letty M. Russell, ed., *The Church with AIDS: Renewal in the Midst of Crisis* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>257</sup> *ibid.*

was practiced in the 1980s.<sup>258</sup> Significantly, the group committed itself to pushing at the “limits of diversity” the Christian churches in order to stand in greater solidarity with the persons with AIDS around the world and members of many different congregations.<sup>259</sup>

In listening and reflecting theologically on the experience of AIDS in the Christian churches, the NCC study group was led to an increasingly prophetic stand on the issues of both AIDS and homosexuality, even as they rightly acknowledged that there was no fundamental link between the two. The group insisted that only by fully including persons with AIDS in Christian worshipping communities could the larger Church stake a claim to being truly unified, and called on all churches to define unity not in terms of doctrinal agreements, but in terms of “shared action on behalf of justice and wholeness for all persons.”<sup>260</sup> Although the turn of mainstream churches toward explicit issues of social justice had a long pedigree, the AIDS crisis prompted the NCC to not only embrace the cause of Christian social transformation, but to place it over and above issues of doctrine and traditional Christian sexual morality. Unsurprisingly, many churches would balk at the implications of such statements, but it is nonetheless striking that it was AIDS, rather than more “mainstream” social justice issues such as civil rights, that prompted the most radical expressions of Christian social justice in the postwar years.

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<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, 26

<sup>259</sup> *ibid.* 28.

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.*

In practical terms, the NCC recommended that churches work diligently to welcome persons with AIDS fully into worship services and the broader life of the church community. This engagement with persons with AIDS often took the form of healing services and other forms of outreach, many of them pioneered by MCC congregations in Los Angeles and across the country. At the San Francisco MCC, for example, monthly healing services were established in 1987 that included scriptural reflections that spoke explicitly to the experience of suffering among persons with AIDS, and in the gay and lesbian community in the city more generally.<sup>261</sup> In turn, placing AIDS ministry at the center of the church's life also inspired an educational outreach to the broader community, with MCC churches playing a key role in letter-writing campaigns, workshops, and public lectures with the twin goal of destigmatizing the disease and continuing the work, begun by ministers such as Ken Martin and Steve Pieters, of arguing for a positive theological vision of homosexuality in a time of fear and backlash in some quarters of the Christian community.<sup>262</sup>

Many churches in Los Angeles followed the lead of MCC congregations, at least in terms of pastoral outreach to persons with AIDS. For example, Frederick Borsch, the Episcopal bishop of Los Angeles, called on all of his clergy to enter into a personal, pastoral relationship with a person with AIDS, and further enjoined his congregations to set up hospices for those with AIDS and to contribute financially to AIDS research and

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<sup>261</sup> *ibid.*, 167.

<sup>262</sup> *ibid.*, 171.

the foundation of AIDS wards in local hospitals.<sup>263</sup> Mainstream religious leaders were also instrumental in establishing the AIDS Interfaith Council of Southern California, which provided educational materials for churches, synagogues, and temples in Los Angeles, helping religious institutions navigate the crisis and encouraging charitable works such as hospital visits, food banks, and other forms of financial assistance to persons with AIDS.<sup>264</sup>

Other church-based initiatives geared toward AIDS ministry grew out of the black churches, belying the assumption that African American congregations were universally reticent to confront either the issue of homosexuality or the AIDS crisis. In 1985, Rev. Carl Bean, a Unity Fellowship minister, founded the Minority AIDS Project, with the goal of ministering in both the black and Latino communities of Los Angeles, which had been woefully underserved in the initial years of the crisis.<sup>265</sup> Bean, much like Steve Pieters, was born into a religious family, but felt unwelcome in the black churches of his native Baltimore.<sup>266</sup> While living in Los Angeles, Bean found his way to the MCC, which rekindled his faith and sense of acceptance, inspiring him to continue with his theology studies and form his own church.<sup>267</sup> In a later interview, Bean recalled that

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<sup>263</sup> Frederick Houk Borsch, *Outrage and Hope: A Bishop's Reflections in Times of Change and Challenge* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 28.

<sup>264</sup> Greg Braxton. "Church Leaders Study AIDS Education." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Oct 2, 1988, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/280579451?accountid=7418> (accessed April 26, 2015).

<sup>265</sup> F. Finley McRae, "Minister Serves Victims of AIDS," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 12, 1987, A5.

<sup>266</sup> Lynn Simross. "The 'Rev.' Responds to Calling." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Aug 15, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154302817?accountid=7418> (accessed April 26, 2015).

<sup>267</sup> *ibid.*

when he began his AIDS outreach, precious little information about the disease had made its way into minority communities in Los Angeles, with not so much as a brochure available to educate people about AIDS and the dangers it posed to individuals and the community at large.

Despite Bean's efforts, he encountered a great deal of resistance and indifference to AIDS in the minority communities he served, and remarked that minority churches often had as much, or more, difficulty in dealing with issues of AIDS and sexuality than the white churches.<sup>268</sup> Much of Bean's outreach to persons with AIDS therefore centered on providing them with practical support, from buying groceries and making home visits, to ensuring that they were able to get to their doctor's appointments. Nevertheless, Bean worked tirelessly to build networks of support for minority persons with AIDS, appearing at numerous community forums and frequently speaking about AIDS ministry on black radio station in the city. Like many a prophet before him, however, Bean's was often a lonely voice in a minority church community that was marked in large part by silence around the AIDS crisis.

The Catholic Church was similarly conflicted in its response to AIDS, which highlighted the tensions between doctrine and the struggle for justice that the NCC had identified. In 1986, Catholic archbishop Roger Mahony established an AIDS hospice in Los Angeles, staffed by Mother Teresa's missionary congregation, the Daughters of Charity, modeling it on a similar effort in New York's Greenwich Village. In

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<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*

announcing the initiative, Mahony urged all Catholics not only to do their part to ease the suffering of persons with AIDS, but also to recognize the dignity of gay Catholics in the archdiocese.<sup>269</sup> Members of the gay Catholic organization Dignity noted that it was one of the first times a Catholic leader had used the term “gay” rather than “homosexual,” a change in terminology that they welcomed as a sign of the Catholic Church’s growing recognition of the presence of gay Catholics in their midst.<sup>270</sup>

Dignity’s sense of progress proved to be fleeting. Despite a sizeable, if flawed, response on the part of the Catholic Church in Los Angeles to the AIDS crisis--such as opening hospices for person with AIDS--a growing conflict with Dignity significantly damaged the quality of the Church’s witness on the issue. Although Dignity had won cautious acceptance in some corners of the Church after its inception in the early-1970s, the political winds had shifted by the 1980s, especially under the more conservative leadership of Pope John Paul II (1978-2005).<sup>271</sup> At Dignity’s 1987 National Convention, the group explicitly repudiated traditional Catholic moral teaching on the sinfulness of same-sex sexual activity, expanding on Dignity’s original position that homosexual relationships could be just as “unitive” as those between heterosexuals.<sup>272</sup> To many in the

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<sup>269</sup> Stephen Braun and William Nottingham. "L.A. Archdiocese Discussing Plans to Set Up Hospice for AIDS Victims." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 3, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154678339?accountid=14707> (accessed April 26, 2015).

<sup>270</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> Pope John Paul II was a complicated figure, and in some ways--notably interreligious dialogue--he was quite progressive by Catholic standards. However, he tended to appoint traditionally-minded bishops, which lent a more conservative cast to his papacy, especially at the local level.

<sup>272</sup> see chapter 3.



Catholic hierarchy, Dignity's position not only represented a disagreement on moral theology, but placed the group outside of Catholicism altogether.

The controversy came to a head in 1989, when the archbishop of Los Angeles, Roger Mahony, issued a letter in which he condemned Dignity for its departure from Catholic moral teaching, even as he insisted that the Church was in no way discriminating against gay Catholics more generally.<sup>273</sup> Because Dignity was a lay-led organization, Mahony did not possess the authority to suppress the organization within his archdiocese, so he instead forbade all Catholic priests from celebrating mass for the group, "in any setting, or for any purpose."<sup>274</sup> In taking this extreme action, Mahony sought to cut Dignity off from the sacramental life of the Church, accomplishing in practice what he could not do directly under Church law.

More than any other event, the AIDS crisis in Los Angeles revealed both the power and limits of Christian prophetic politics in the 1980s. In responding to the needs of persons with AIDS, mainstream churches and their leaders spoke with a clear moral voice, urging compassion, care, and financial support for those suffering from the disease. Moreover, grassroots initiatives, from those of the MCC to the Minority AIDS Project, sought to bring education, hope, and healing to an otherwise desperate situation. Even more significantly, the global dimensions of AIDS initiated an important discussion among theologians over both the disease and its larger ramifications for the ongoing reflection of the churches on issues of diversity and social justice work.

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<sup>273</sup> Dignity USA Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Coll. 2007-004, Box 80:9.

<sup>274</sup> *ibid.*

Despite these real gains, the events surrounding the AIDS crisis in the churches also underlined the difficulty that congregations had in grappling with an emergency that by its nature called into question long-standing Christian views on sexual morality and the role of authority in enforcing that teaching. The prophetic witness of the churches which was so effective in caring for persons with AIDS in Los Angeles did not, in the end, result in generating change in the churches themselves.

### **Homelessness and the Church of the Poor**

In the 1960s, one of the galvanizing social issues of the Christian churches was fair housing, with the churches joining forces to pass the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1963 and, even more significantly, in mobilizing against Rumford's repeal in 1964.<sup>275</sup> By the 1980s, housing, or the lack thereof, also drew the attention of churches and church-based organizations. By 1985, even conservative estimates of Los Angeles' homeless population ranged upwards of 50,000, with many activists and even ordinary observers claiming that the numbers were actually much higher.<sup>276</sup> The reasons for the surging homeless population were multifaceted but fairly obvious, with federal money for urban housing programs being dramatically cut during the Reagan years, as well as the

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<sup>275</sup> See the discussion of the churches' engagement in fair housing in chapter 2 of this project.

<sup>276</sup> Judith Cummings. "The Homeless of Los Angeles make their Numbers Felt." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Dec 15, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/111281610?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).

deinstitutionalization of mentally-ill persons leaving many thousands without adequate shelter of health care.<sup>277</sup>

The county government in Los Angeles was hampered in its efforts to provide relief payments to homeless persons, largely because of California's 1978 cap on taxes which severely constrained the county's budget, especially for social welfare provisions.<sup>278</sup> To bridge the gap created by a lack of public funding, a number of secular organizations stepped in to provide relief, with the American Civil Liberties Union and the Western Center on Law and Poverty going so far as to file suit on behalf of the homeless. These groups argued that California law guaranteed access to housing, and although the lawsuit was not ultimately effective, it nevertheless succeeded in framing the plight of the homeless as an urgent moral issue.<sup>279</sup>

Churches and church-based organizations also played a large role in portraying Los Angeles' homeless problem in moral terms, and deployed a number of strategies, both pragmatic and prophetic, to deal with the issue. With the help of a prominent local law firm, church and other religious leaders joined the ACLU's lawsuit in 1985, with the express purpose of bringing the city's attention to the moral problem in its midst.<sup>280</sup>

Among the many religious leaders to sign on to the lawsuit were the Episcopal bishop of Los Angeles, Oliver Garver, Catholic activist Luis Olivares, and Chip Murray, pastor of

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<sup>277</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> *ibid.* This was a result of the "tax revolt" referendum, Proposition 13, which capped property taxes at 1% of the assessed value of the property.

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> *ibid.*

the city's most elite African American congregation, First AME.<sup>281</sup> The added presence of Jewish leaders marked yet another example of an interdenominational and interreligious coalition forming around a moral and political issue in the city. In terms of the Christian churches, the lawsuit was also a sign of the "common witness" that many church leaders and activists had developed by the 1980s around a host of social issues, especially concerning the attack on social welfare provisions during the Reagan era. But the witness of the churches did not stop at applying legal pressure on the county and city on behalf of the rights of homeless persons to social welfare payments and affordable housing. Rather, it extended to prophetic actions that greatly raised the profile of the homeless problem in Los Angeles and beyond.

In the early-1970s, the Los Angeles Catholic Worker (LACW) house was founded in the city, and quickly became a prominent fixture in Catholic social justice circles, especially in the anti-Vietnam War movement. Like all Catholic Worker communities, the Los Angeles chapter grew out of the original house in New York, founded by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in 1933 to directly serve the poor and witness to their concerns to the larger society.<sup>282</sup> The leader of the LACW, Jeff Dietrich, was frequently on the front-lines of antiwar demonstrations, nuclear freeze protests, and most significantly, advocacy for the homeless, even before the issue exploded into public consciousness in the 1980s. The heart of Dietrich's work was twofold: running a soup

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<sup>281</sup> Dorothy Townsend. "17 Area Clergymen Join Call for Boost in Aid to Homeless." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Dec 18, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154371525?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).

<sup>282</sup> See Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper and Brothers), 1952, 169-281.

kitchen located on Los Angeles' Skid Row and publishing the *Catholic Agitator*, the Los Angeles version of Dorothy Day's original periodical, *The Catholic Worker*.<sup>283</sup>

Dorothy Day, much like Martin Luther King, had been deeply influenced by the theological and philosophical movement known as Personalism, which placed the dignity of the individual at the center of all moral concern.<sup>284</sup> Day creatively fused Personalism with her leftist political stance to create a radical perspective on Catholic social teaching which placed the needs of the poor at the forefront of her social outreach. In many ways, the activities of Dietrich and the LACW were manifestations of this same intellectual and religious position, demonstrating the durability of certain traditions of social Christianity across many decades. However, through his writings in the *Catholic Agitator*, Dietrich brought Day's brand of prophetic social activism to bear on a very different political and economic landscape than Day had encountered decades before in New York.

In confronting the homeless crisis, Dietrich sought not only to raise awareness of the issue in the city, but to transform Christian social engagement to conform more closely to a radical "option for the poor." Writing in the pages of the *Catholic Agitator* in 1988, Dietrich emphasized how the homeless were the appropriate measure with which to judge the quality of Christian social witness writ large. "We believe the problem of homelessness goes to the heart of our problems as a culture," he wrote, "and with our

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<sup>283</sup> See Jeff Dietrich, *Broken and Shared: Food, Dignity, and the Poor on Los Angeles' Skid Row* (Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press), 2011, 1-14. The introduction provides a primer on both Dietrich's evolution as an activist and his indebtedness to Dorothy Day's thought.

<sup>284</sup> *ibid.*

founder, Dorothy Day, we would say, ‘The problem is this filthy rotten system.’”<sup>285</sup>

Dietrich went on to lambast government officials for failing to recognize the deeper cultural significance of the homeless problem, mocking their faith in new pieces of legislation or greater funding for social welfare provisions.<sup>286</sup> While Dietrich was careful not to suggest that he opposed more robust programs on behalf of the homeless, for Dietrich the real problem was essentially spiritual, requiring a radical conversion of heart on the part of all Angelenos. Dietrich argued, somewhat sanctimoniously, that he and the LACW were part of a precious few in the city willing to share a meal and develop a personal relationship with the homeless, a sign that policy prescriptions were doomed to fail because so few people recognized the inherent dignity of those without homes.<sup>287</sup>

In this way, Dietrich revealed a curiously apolitical stance with regard to homelessness, framing the issue instead as a moral and spiritual concern. Underlying his position, however, was a conviction that genuine societal change could only occur if it was preceded by a spiritual transformation. Moreover, much like Christian activists in the AIDS crisis, Dietrich envisioned his prophetic politics as speaking not only to political and economic order of Los Angeles, but also to the Church itself. Dietrich wrote often about how the Catholic Church in Los Angeles failed to live up to its mandate to serve the poor, and even remarked that well-funded organizations such as Catholic Charities often sent homeless persons to the Catholic Worker soup kitchen for a meal,

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<sup>285</sup> Dietrich, *Broken and Shared*, 334.

<sup>286</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*

rather than provide one themselves. Dietrich was a particularly fierce opponent of officials in the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles whom he felt paid more attention to the Church's finances than they did to the urgent needs of the poor in their midst.<sup>288</sup> Although Dietrich's prophetic stance on homelessness, the state of the Church, and the moral corruption of American society had little discernible impact on policy decisions in Los Angeles, the LACW stood as a concrete example of a moral and spiritual vision decidedly at odds with the prevailing political winds of the Reagan era and a challenge to political and religious orthodoxies that marginalized the needs of the poor.

Despite Dietrich's vociferous complaints, institutional church leaders did play a significant role in pressing government officials in Los Angeles to address the plight of the homeless population. In 1986, Catholic archbishop Roger Mahony lent his moral clout to the issue of relief payments to the homeless, arguing before the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors that the \$228 a month payments that the homeless received at the time were too little to even rent a room on Skid Row, where rents were generally \$240 per month.<sup>289</sup> Mahony also challenged the board to ease oppressive penalties that barred relief payments for 60 days to anyone who missed appointments at the welfare office or failed to show up for work dates, as homeless persons often did. Despite Mahony's pleading, the board voted along political lines to deny the archbishop's requests, citing the \$50 million that such changes would cost the county. In a time of

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<sup>288</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>289</sup> Kevin Roderick. "Supervisors Will Look at Plea on Aid Mahony Takes Poverty Case to Board." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Jun 07, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292410398?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).

constrained urban budgets, the moral suasion of religious leaders could only go so far, especially at the local level. In the absence of political will to address issues of urban policy at a national level, church leaders often found themselves, like Mahony, offering moral arguments that rarely translated into concrete changes in social policy.

Ultimately, churches and other religious organizations took matters into their own hands in addressing the lack of shelter for the homeless in Los Angeles. Although the Bradley administration laid out an ambitious plan in 1988 to dedicate \$2 billion toward providing housing for the homeless, the city's initiatives were slow to get off the ground.<sup>290</sup> However, religious institutions soon were able to take advantage of a combination of their own financial resources, private capital, and government grants to provide low-income housing for at least a portion of Los Angeles' homeless population. One such effort was the Church and Temple Housing Corporation, a partnership between Pasadena's All Saint's Episcopal Church and Leo Baeck Temple, a Reform Jewish community located in West Los Angeles.<sup>291</sup> In 1989, the Church and Temple Housing corporation worked to raise money for the establishment of Genesis, a single-occupancy hotel on Skid Row, with rents low enough for the homeless to afford rooms, even on their meager relief payments. Featuring a community room, a kitchen, and laundry facilities,

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<sup>290</sup> Richard W. Stevenson. "Los Angeles Gets \$2 Billion Plan to Provide Housing for Homeless." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jan 09, 1988, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/110602646?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).

<sup>291</sup> "Make it Permanent." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, May 15, 1989, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/280849332?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).



as well as providing counseling and job-placement services, Genesis not only provided housing for the homeless, but also a sense of community.<sup>292</sup>

The Church and Temple Housing Corporation would be a harbinger of things to come. As the prophetic witness of the churches and other religious institutions failed to persuade government officials to do more to address the needs of the homeless, innovative new partnerships emerged to confront the problem more directly. By the 1990s, such initiatives became the hallmark of the churches' social outreach, highlighting the limits of prophetic politics and the urgent need for more pragmatic approaches to social problems.<sup>293</sup> While few congregations became a "church of the poor" as Jeff Dietrich and the LACW might have liked, many placed the moral issue of homelessness near the center of their concern, with at least a few tangible results.

### **City of Sanctuary**

Much like the AIDS and homelessness crises which unfolded in Los Angeles contemporaneously, the Sanctuary Movement also demonstrated the powerful witness that churches could offer on behalf of marginalized populations, but also the limits of that

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<sup>292</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> See Michael B. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 148-156, and Axel R. Shafer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 123-162.

witness as it ran up against the authority of both civil government and that of the church, most notably the Catholic Church.

In 1985, Father Luis Olivares, who had been an activist since the 1970s through his leadership in the United Neighborhoods Organization (UNO), declared his parish, La Placita, a sanctuary for the thousands of Central American refugees fleeing the civil violence in their home countries, especially El Salvador and Guatemala. Moreover, he committed his parish to providing a range of services for the refugees, to help smooth their difficult transition to a new country. At the announcement, Olivares remarked that declaring the church a sanctuary grew out of a long tradition of churches standing with the poor and oppressed, as well as providing shelter for those in desperate situations.<sup>294</sup> However, in the context of the 1980s, Olivares' declaration was also fundamentally political, a rebuke to the Reagan administration's policies of supporting pro-American dictatorships in Central America, resulting in years of civil war in countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua. Joining Olivares at the announcement were many of the refugees themselves, who shared harrowing stories with La Placita parishioners about their experience of poverty and war in Central America.<sup>295</sup> Also in attendance were a number of Los Angeles' religious leadership, including Episcopal bishop Oliver Garver,

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<sup>294</sup> Marita Hernandez. "L.A.'s Oldest Catholic Parish Declares itself a Sanctuary for Latin Refugees." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Dec 13, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154457691?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).

<sup>295</sup> *ibid.*

who expressed his church's support for Olivares and the emerging Sanctuary Movement in the city.<sup>296</sup>

Just a month prior, religious leaders and activists scored a notable victory when the Los Angeles City Council, in a controversial move, voted in favor of declaring Los Angeles a sanctuary city, directing city agencies to refuse to cooperate with INS in the arrest and deportation of Central American refugees.<sup>297</sup> Over the strenuous objections of federal officials and six of the fourteen council members, the resolution promised a safe haven in the city for those fleeing the violence in Central America, until such time as it would be safe for the refugees to return home. One of the key figures in passing the resolution was Councilman Michael Woo, the first Asian American to serve on the council, who remarked at the time that the sanctuary declaration was an important step in recognizing the rights of people with no political representation in the city, and a statement that Los Angeles was a city open to immigrants.

In passing the sanctuary resolution, Los Angeles joined several other cities in passing similar measures, largely through political pressure by religious groups, to shelter Central American refugees.<sup>298</sup> Although the resolutions, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, were largely symbolic, as the INS could continue to deport refugees on its own, church activists viewed the council's decision as momentous. Sister Jo'Ann De Quattro, a

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<sup>296</sup> The Sanctuary Movement was national in scope, with important centers of activity in Tucson and San Antonio, in addition to Los Angeles.

<sup>297</sup> Victor Merina. "Council Votes 8-6 for L.A. Sanctuary." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 28, 1985, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154491876?accountid=7418> (accessed April 26, 2015).

<sup>298</sup> *ibid.* In California, San Jose and San Francisco, and eventually San Diego, passed similar legislation just before and after Los Angeles.

Catholic woman religious and head of the Southern California Ecumenical Council's Interfaith Task Force on Central America, declared that the sanctuary resolution not only was a welcome development for refugees, but also a sharp rebuke of Reagan administration policies that refused to grant political asylum to those fleeing the civil violence in Central America.<sup>299</sup>

The apparent victory of the sanctuary resolution proved ephemeral, however, as increasing political backlash forced the City Council to reverse course in early-1986, retracting the original resolution's promise to not cooperate with the INS and offering instead a watered-down commendation of the efforts of church groups in aiding refugees.<sup>300</sup> This setback was compounded by the INS's threat to terminate the tax-exempt status of any churches participating in the Sanctuary Movement, and to thoroughly investigate the churches for possible violations of federal immigration law.<sup>301</sup> Nevertheless, Olivares held firm, refusing to recognize the validity of the federal government's position and redoubling his efforts on behalf of the refugees.

As the political crisis in Central America deepened, new threats emerged in Los Angeles, as Salvadoran "death squads" were rumored to be active in the city, seeking out refugees who supported leftist rebels. In 1987, Olivares received a menacing letter, reportedly from a right-wing paramilitary group in El Salvador, threatening the safety of

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<sup>299</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> Victor Merina. "Young L.A. Councilman Gets Badly Bruised in Sanctuary Battle." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Feb 18, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/154493807?accountid=7418> (accessed April 26, 2015).

<sup>301</sup> Garcia, *Catolicos*, 238.

both Olivares and those he sheltered in La Placita.<sup>302</sup> Olivares had good reason to fear the power of the Salvadoran death squads, as they had been responsible for the death of a number of priests and nuns during El Salvador's civil war, and had assassinated the archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, in 1980.<sup>303</sup> Olivares had named the sanctuary program in his church after another martyr of the civil war, the Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, a close friend of Romero's who had been gunned down by paramilitary forces in 1977.<sup>304</sup> Although a subsequent FBI investigation proved inconclusive, the climate of fear that engulfed the Central American refugee community was all too real.

On September 21, 1988, Olivares and two other Roman Catholic priests, who were already well known in Los Angeles for their activism on behalf of immigrants rights, wrote an open letter of sorts to the Immigration and Naturalization Service that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>305</sup> Fathers Greg Boyle and Michael Kennedy, who worked at the tiny Jesuit parish, Dolores Mission, in the heart of East L.A.'s Pico-Aliso housing project, joined Olivares in arguing for the dignity of Central American refugees and in his ongoing battle against the INS. Harold Ezell, then the western regional director of the INS, had chastised those involved in the Sanctuary Movement, claiming

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<sup>302</sup> Laurie Becklund. "'Death Squad' Threat Prompts FBI Inquiry." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Jul 18, 1987, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/816694125?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).

<sup>303</sup> For more on Oscar Romero, see, among others, Scott Wright, *Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 2009.

<sup>304</sup> Becklund, "Death Squad."

<sup>305</sup> Sanctuary for the undocumented: Above the law, but faithful to a higher authority. (1988, Sep 21). *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/909585860?accountid=14707>

that “no one is above the law,” and that anyone, including clergy, whom he found aiding and abetting the undocumented would “be held to answer to the law.”<sup>306</sup>

In response, the three activist priests made a cogent legal argument that the struggle for rights and human dignity were inherently beyond the law: “We write, then, to clarify our position: that although we are not above the law, the struggle of undocumented people to assert their rights as human beings *is*,” [emphasis original] they wrote.<sup>307</sup> As Roman Catholics, the three priests quite naturally went on to ground their argument in their religious faith and in their reading of Scripture. However, their claims were far more radical than a mere moral critique of the existing legal order. Instead, they called on all people of religious faith to actively bring their faith perspective to bear on questions of law and the legality of immigration. They wrote, “Jesus, of course, would seek to do even more. He would publicly denounce unjust policies and laws so that hearts would change and that such personal conversion would result in the radical transformation of policy and law.” To this end, the priests recommended a number of specific actions that religiously motivated persons and communities could undertake on behalf of the undocumented, such as resisting the INS’ employee-verification protocol, denouncing the aggressive tactics of police and INS agents in rounding up suspected “illegals,” and encouraging employers to actively hire (and adequately compensate) undocumented laborers.

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<sup>306</sup> See “Sanctuary for the undocumented: Above the law, but faithful to a higher authority.” (1988, Sep 21). *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/909585860?accountid=14707>

<sup>307</sup> *ibid.*

Embedded in the three priests' appeal to the consciences of the ethically-minded readers of the *Los Angeles Times* in 1988 was a concept central not only to Catholic social teaching, but to both theological and secular legal thought in the postwar world: dignity. They argued strenuously that "we oppose laws that would legitimize the designation of people without documents as non-persons, sub-human, not worthy of the respect and dignity afforded the rest of us." By linking the struggle for immigrants rights with a broader, religiously-based notion of human dignity, these activists raised important questions about the relationship of dignity—along with rights, one of the cornerstones of modern political thought and practice—and the law. However, religious activists in Los Angeles who were inspired by notions of human dignity did not limit their actions in the 1980s to defying what they believed to be unjust laws.

Nearly contemporaneous with the efforts of activists involved with the Sanctuary Movement was the involvement of several religious organizations in the implementation of the Reagan-era amnesty program for undocumented immigrants, part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). Ironically, certain provisions in IRCA were the very same ones that drew the ire of immigration rights activists such as Kennedy, Boyle, and Olivares, including employee-verification and the criminalization of the hiring of undocumented workers. In fact, Olivares and several other religious leaders had spoken out often against these provisions, and Olivares went so far as to offer sanctuary protection for the many thousands of immigrants who failed to qualify for

amnesty under the 1986 law, in addition to the many refugees that his church already sheltered.<sup>308</sup>

Nevertheless, an important aspect of the 1986 legislation was the legalization of certain undocumented immigrants who had entered the United States before 1982. As Olivares was acutely aware, because many of the refugees from Central America had entered the U.S. after 1982, they did not qualify for what became known as the amnesty program. However, hundreds of thousands of immigrants, many of whom were laborers from Mexico, did qualify for the amnesty program under the provisions of IRCA. IRCA itself was the latest iteration of U.S. immigration reform that had begun in earnest two decades earlier with the Hart-Celler Act, which profoundly altered the structure and makeup of the American immigration system.

In 1965, the United States Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, better known as the Hart-Celler Act, that largely dismantled the quota system and other exclusionary practices that for decades had ensured that the vast majority of immigrants to the United States were from northern and western European backgrounds. Hart-Celler effectively reopened the United States to immigration from Asia, after a long period of legal exclusion, as well as from Latin America, Africa, and beyond. While scholars disagree as to just how liberal the intentions of Hart-Celler actually were, the consequences of the law have been clear: a major influx of immigrants from previously underrepresented nations and a durable shift in the demography of American cities, suburbs, and even rural areas.

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<sup>308</sup> Claudia Puig. "Bishop, 2 Priests Urge Celebrants to Oppose Parts of Amnesty Law." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Dec 13, 1987, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/900669399?accountid=7418> (accessed April 27, 2015).



Passed in 1986, IRCA sought to continue the reform of Hart-Cellar, but also had the effect of creating entirely new categories of “illegal” immigrants, as recent scholarship by Mae Ngai and others have so persuasively argued.<sup>309</sup> Nevertheless, the amnesty program did offer at least an opportunity for undocumented immigrants to regularize their status as American citizens. However, the federal government devoted few resources to actually processing these immigrants through the system, and understandable fears of the government among many in the immigrant community meant that many did not take advantage of the amnesty program at all.

In Los Angeles, as in many other American cities at the time, it was religious groups and organizations that stepped in to provide an important bridge between immigrants and the state under the auspices of the amnesty program. In Los Angeles, thousands of undocumented immigrants, mainly Mexicans, applied for citizenship through programs established by Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and the national Protestant organization Church World Service. These offices, often established in churches and community centers in immigrant neighborhoods such as Pico-Union in Los Angeles, were soon overwhelmed, given their small staffs and limited budgets. Nevertheless, although the exact number of immigrants who were processed through religious auspices remains unclear, thousands of undocumented immigrants in the 1980s

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<sup>309</sup> See Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 253-265.

became American citizens because of these important outreach efforts on the part of religious social service organizations.<sup>310</sup>

Indeed, mainstream religious leaders had long been developing their own notions of the inherent dignity of undocumented immigrants, both in tandem with, and sometimes in tension with, more radical religious voices like that of Olivares. The then-newly-installed Roman Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles, Roger Mahony, in his first pastoral letter to his new flock, wrote on the issue of immigration, stating that “there are no strangers in the community of faith,” and that the Catholic Church’s stance on immigrants rights was rooted in “our faith vision of the human family, its unity, the dignity of every human person.” Although not as radical as some in his work on behalf of the undocumented (Mahony somewhat opposed, in fact, the work of Olivares, Kennedy, and Boyle), Mahony nevertheless manifested a religiously-infused politics of dignity, and leveraged the resources of his archdiocese in the defense, as he saw it, of the undocumented.<sup>311</sup>

The prophetic politics of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles left lasting legacies for the development of the politics of dignity. The work of Luis Olivares and his associates revealed the increasingly transnational character of Christian social witness in the period through a direct engagement with Central American politics and a deep

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<sup>310</sup> B. Williams. (1987, May 03). More than 100,000 immigrants expected to apply for legal status. *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/898789473?accountid=14707>

<sup>311</sup> See the longer discussion of Mahony’s outreach to Latinos and his use of dignitarian language in chapter 4. The quotation may be found in John Dart, “Catholics Urged to Welcome Immigrants Ethnic ‘Groups Enrich Church Life, Mahony Says in Pastoral Letter.” *Los Angeles Times* (Pre-1997 Fulltext), Jan 04, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292217414?accountid=7418> (accessed April 30, 2015).

awareness of the experience of the churches in Latin America. Although Christian social thought and practice throughout the postwar decades was marked by an attention to global concerns, the Sanctuary Movement was especially explicit in arguing that the “divine law” of human dignity transcended national frameworks and the civil laws of the United States. Even more than the churches’ response to the AIDS crisis and homelessness in Los Angeles, the Sanctuary Movement pointed to the ways in which Christian social witness could effectively confront injustice at both the local and international level.

Nevertheless, the far less confrontational politics of institutional church leaders such as Roger Mahony also resulted in real gains for Los Angeles’ burgeoning immigrant community. In helping to process thousands of immigrants under the 1986 amnesty law, religious institutions put decades of concern over immigration policy into practice. No less than the activists of the Sanctuary Movement, more church leaders also witnessed to the fundamental principles of human dignity, and contributed to the “common witness” of the churches on issues of immigration that marked the period.

## **Conclusion**

No decade was as pivotal in the development of the politics of dignity among the mainstream Christian churches than the 1980s. The social witness of the churches on a wide range of issues had a direct impact on the social and political life of Los Angeles, and represented the clearest articulation of postwar Christian social thought and policy in the public square during the decades after the Second World War. Broad agreement by church leaders and activists on the moral necessity of addressing the AIDS crisis, Central

American refugees, and the burgeoning homeless population led to concrete initiatives with tangible results for otherwise marginalized populations.

In important respects, the prophetic voice with which the churches in Los Angeles spoke in the 1980s was the fruit of the “rising down” of social Christianity which began in the late-1960s, when liberationist practices combined with community organizations to provide political and moral clout to minorities, racial and sexual, across the city. By the 1980s, many of the institutions and activists of this earlier period, such as MCC and Luis Olivares, were able to speak not only for their own neighborhoods and congregations, but to the entire city, advocating for social change on a much broader scale than they ever had before.

Nevertheless, the prophetic politics of the Christian churches in the 1980s contained serious limitations. The witness of the churches on the AIDS crisis, for example, was deeply constrained by fights within Christianity over traditional notions of sexual morality and authority, while Christian advocacy on behalf of the homeless often failed to address the underlying causes of poverty and inequality. Even more significantly, while many church leaders and activists fought for the dignity of Central American refugees, racial tensions were simmering closer to home that proved much more difficult to address.

In some ways, church leaders and activists in the 1980s were presented with a series of issues which, while urgent, lent themselves quite easily to a Christian moral and political vision that preached care for the sick, asylum for refugees, and the feeding of the hungry. The 1992 Los Angeles riots, however, provided no such moral or political

certainty. In order to deal effectively with the riots and their aftermath, the churches would soon discover that they needed far more than prophetic politics: They would need a plan.

## Chapter 6

### **Time of Visitation: Social Christianity and Economic Justice in Neoliberal Los Angeles**

In the aftermath of the civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992, five Lutheran pastors from churches in neighborhoods directly impacted by the violence decided to pool their collective resources, forming what became known as the New City Parish in a sprawling, dizzyingly diverse section in the heart of the city west of Downtown, measuring some ninety-eight square miles.<sup>312</sup> Their goal was, unsurprisingly, primarily spiritual: to better evangelize underserved and often neglected populations within the boundaries of the novel new entity. However, the five pastors also recognized in their communities an urgent need to develop a platform for economic justice in the city, and to provide their congregants with skills and opportunities that might advance their “socio-economic well-being.” To this end, New City Parish quickly established a microlending program called “A Bridge to Hope,” which provided small loans and other services to enterprising members of the community as a way of encouraging economic independence and community economic development.

This collaboration by the pastors across the standard geographical boundaries of their respective Lutheran parishes was not entirely new. As early as the 1930s, a group of liberal Protestant congregations surrounding the University of Southern California near downtown Los Angeles had organized as a single entity known as the University Parish

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<sup>312</sup> See the New City Parish website <http://www.newcityparish.org/about-us.html> (accessed 24 April 2015).

in order to provide more efficient and effective social and spiritual services during the Great Depression. This effort was in many ways replicated in the same neighborhood in 1968 with the formation of the Greater University Parish (GUP), with the inclusion of local Catholic parishes as part of the consortium.<sup>313</sup> However, the New City Parish also represented a different kind of approach to the changing social and economic context of Los Angeles in the post-1992 years that leveraged new, albeit constrained, opportunities for congregation-based economic programs that had taken root in cities with the decline in urban liberalism and the rise of “neoliberal” city government by the early-1990s.<sup>314</sup>

Several years earlier, Jesuit priest Greg Boyle, who had recently stepped down as pastor of Dolores Mission parish in the center of the Pico-Aliso housing project in Boyle Heights, had also recognized the urgent need for jobs in a neighborhood beset by unprecedented levels of gang violence. Boyle established a program called Jobs for a Future, with its telling slogan, “nothing stops a bullet like a job,” leveraging the work of the parish’s many “base communities” to create a range of gang-prevention services, including an alternative school and a day care center built on parish grounds.<sup>315</sup>

Eventually, Boyle would transform Jobs for a Future into a different kind of venture entirely: a non-profit small business known as Homeboy Industries. Although it emerged out of Boyle’s own experience of liberation theology in Bolivia and the

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<sup>313</sup> See the discussion of GUP in Chapter 2 of this project.

<sup>314</sup> I use the term “neoliberalism” in a broad sense, marking the period in which governments turned to market-based solutions in the social policy arena and the effects of a globalized economy began to be felt at the local level. For an introduction to neoliberalism, see Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>315</sup> Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 2-3.

immigrants' rights movement in Los Angeles, Homeboy Industries became a Great Society-type job training program with a twist-- it was itself a business, beginning as a bakery and later expanding into a silk-screening shop, restaurant, and assorted other partnerships and entrepreneurial ventures.

Closer to Downtown, in the late-1980s, Sister Diane Donoghue, a veteran community organizer at St. Vincent's Catholic parish (a member of GUP), a historic church in the midst of a burgeoning Central American immigrant community, employed community and local business resources to begin Esperanza Community Housing, a kind of venture that would soon be known as a "faith-based initiative." Donoghue had spent a number of years as a community organizer operating out of St. Vincent's Catholic Church near downtown Los Angeles, where she devoted much of her time opposing the business interests that she and the community felt were encroaching on the neighborhood. By the 1980s, however, Donoghue began to partner with some of those same businesses in order to provide housing and, more broadly, a concrete path toward a religious and political ideal: economic dignity.<sup>316</sup>

The efforts of church-based organizations to promote economic dignity in neoliberal Los Angeles grew out of the long-standing engagement of churches with the labor movement, community empowerment, and social justice that have been discussed in earlier chapters. However, these initiatives also took place against a backdrop of evolving Christian social thought on economic justice and changing strategies on the part

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<sup>316</sup> Marlene Cimon. "Major Low-Income Housing Drive Launched." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Feb 28, 1991. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1645283914>. Alexander von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America's Urban Neighborhoods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 207-250.



of churches to address economic issues at the grassroots. Even before the civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992, mainstream Christian churches, most notably the Catholic Church, had begun to focus squarely on issues of inequality and lack of economic opportunity in American society, especially its cities. This intellectual turn, combined with renewed traditions of community development in the black churches, fused in the 1990s to create a distinctive strand of dignitarian urban politics with a pronounced emphasis on economic justice.

The political and economic realities of neoliberal Los Angeles in the 1990s, which included the collapse of Tom Bradley's liberal coalition and continued deindustrialization, pushed churches and church-based organizations into active partnership with business interests in the city, even as they sought to maintain a prophetic stance with regard to economic inequality. Moreover, the moral urgency on the part of churches to play an active role in the rebuilding of Los Angeles after the 1992 riots provided even more incentive to cooperate with the economic and political forces of neoliberalism. In many ways, therefore, churches and church-based organizations in neoliberal Los Angeles spoke with a prophetic voice in promoting a Christian vision of economic justice, even as, in some ways, their practices helped underwrite and legitimize the sources of that inequality. This ambiguous, yet important, role that churches took on in neoliberal Los Angeles is the subject of this chapter.

## Los Angeles and the Global Economy

Much like other industrial American cities, Los Angeles grappled with a continuous and accelerating loss of unionized jobs in the postwar decades, especially as key economic sectors such as the aerospace and defense industries moved their facilities to new locations in Texas and other “business-friendly” areas in the Sunbelt. Whereas the heart of African American Los Angeles, for example, had once been situated in the midst of a thriving, if racially-stratified, industrial corridor at midcentury, by the 1970s and 80s, these same neighborhoods were confronting patterns of disinvestment, high unemployment, and general economic decline more typically associated with the Rustbelt.<sup>317</sup> At the same time, many light manufacturing enterprises and sweatshops were taking the place of the departed factories, providing low-wage work for Los Angeles’ burgeoning immigrant population. Furthermore, increasing levels of segregation in Los Angeles, especially among Latinos and other immigrant groups, heightened deeper trends of economic inequality in the city after the 1960s.

The result of these economic and demographic shifts in Los Angeles was a highly stratified, segmented, and racialized labor force, with stunningly unequal outcomes across racial divides in key areas, ranging from educational opportunities, the availability of housing, and access to employment. Moreover, the roots of this economic inequality were global in scope, a direct consequence of the flight of jobs overseas, the continuing

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<sup>317</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Los Angeles’ place in the global economy and the high levels of inequality in the city, see Lawrence D. Bobo, et al., *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 3-50. Much of my discussion of inequality in Los Angeles is adapted from the empirical findings found here.

decline of the American industrial sector, and policies enacted at the national level to encourage free trade and the deregulation of markets. By the 1980s, Los Angeles had become an important node in a global network of capital flows and international business, but also a place where the forces of globalization trapped millions of people, many of them immigrants and people of color, in low-wage jobs with few benefits and a bleak outlook for economic advancement.

The grassroots initiatives of church-affiliated organizations to address economic injustice could do little to alter these underlying global forces that were shrinking opportunities for millions of people in Los Angeles by the 1980s and 1990s. However, national church bodies took notice of the changing economic conditions that were disproportionately affecting the poor and minorities in Los Angeles and across the country. To address the challenges of this altered economic landscape, mainstream Christian churches developed their own vision of a more equitable and just economy.

### **Economic Justice for All**

During the Reagan years, the mainstream churches grew increasingly concerned about rising levels of income inequality, the erosion of the labor movement, and the proliferation of debt among developing nations, among other pressing issues in the economic sphere.<sup>318</sup> In an American context, the churches rightly worried that the

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<sup>318</sup> See note 4 of Stuart Goodrich Baskin, "In Search of a Moral Economy: Churches and Theologians in the Milieu of the 1980s." Order No. 3061036, Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2002, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305454874?accountid=7418> (accessed April 20, 2015), which provides a summary of economic policy statements among the mainstream churches. Baskin identifies, as I do, the Catholic bishops' letter, "Economic Justice for All," as having been the most influential such intervention.

withering of the welfare state under Reagan's policies of tax-cutting and retrenchment would have dire consequences for the poorest members of American society. In 1986, in direct response to the shifting economic landscape of the 1980s, the Catholic bishops of the United States released a pastoral letter on the economy titled, "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," which outlined a broad vision for the role of morality in the marketplace and the demands of economic justice. The bishops' letter became the most influential, and controversial, statement of social Christianity regarding the 1980s, stirring heated discussion, both for and against, across denominational lines and in the pages of newspapers and journals of opinion throughout the country.<sup>319</sup>

Building on a tradition of Catholic social thought that dated to the late-nineteenth century encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), the American bishops set out to apply Catholic concepts of the common good, the social use of property, and the protection of the poor to the U.S. economy of the 1980s. Their first claim, however, was philosophical, underlining the notion that the purpose of all economic activity was to serve "the spiritual and material well-being of people," rather than the needs of corporations or shareholders. This statement alone was enough to raise the ire of an emerging group of pro-capitalist American Catholics, most notably Michael Novak, who claimed that the Church was overstepping its moral authority by declaiming on the

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<sup>319</sup> The text of "Economic Justice for All" can be found in many sources. See David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 572-680.

morality or immorality of economic affairs.<sup>320</sup>

The bishops went on to frame their discussion, as most postwar Christian social thought had, in terms of human dignity, by arguing that the United States had a moral obligation to provide a minimum-level of economic security to all of its citizens in recognition of the basic dignity of all people. The defense of dignity and the search for economic justice led the bishops to propose a series of concrete reforms in the American political and economic systems, including the provision of a guaranteed income and measures to promote full employment, and a substantial increase in social welfare provisions.<sup>321</sup> Moreover, the bishops noted the growing relationship between the American economy and the debt of developing nations, and urged the American government to place the needs of poorer countries ahead of strategic concerns.

The bishops not only placed a recognition of the interconnectedness of a global economy at the heart of their economic vision, but also borrowed terminology from the liberationist traditions of Latin American theology to shape their policy prescriptions. The bishops proposed that the United States adopt a “preferential option for the poor” and place the needs and aspirations of the most impoverished members of American society at the forefront of its economic concern. However idealistic this plea might have been, it more importantly reflected the purchase that liberation theology had by the 1980s even

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<sup>320</sup> Michael Novak was known in the 1970s as a defender of what he called “unmeltable ethnics,” the white, working class ethnic groups which were prevalent in the Catholic Church, but by the 1980s began to write more about economic issues. For his defense of the free market from a Catholic perspective, see Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1991), 237-360.

<sup>321</sup> See “Some Excerpts from Catholic Bishops’ Letter, ‘Economic Justice for All’,” *Los Angeles Times* (Pre-1997 Fulltext), Nov 15, 1986, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/292535038?accountid=7418> (accessed April 24, 2015), which provides a condensed version of the very long pastoral letter.

among the highest leadership of the American Church.

Although “Economic Justice for All” had little impact on the economic policies of the United States in the Reagan years, many mainstream churches continued to make the preferential option for the poor the basis of their economic vision. At the grassroots level, this resulted in numerous attempts to achieve, on a small scale, what the Catholic bishops hoped would happen nationally, namely, the development of economic activity that would serve the common good of communities and be evaluated in the light of how it served the poor. In an era in which the glories of capitalism were celebrated in many corners of American society, and indeed the churches, the struggle for economic justice would of necessity be carried out in neighborhoods, community development organizations, and church-based initiatives, often out-of-sight of the larger public.

In important ways, however, black congregations across the country were already focused on bringing economic justice and expanded opportunity to predominantly African American neighborhoods in cities across the country, running ahead of other churches in practice, if not in theory. Of course, the commitment of black churches to economic development was nothing new, owing to the prominent role that African American congregations had played in the black community dating back to the days of slavery. By the 1980s, black churches in various American cities were using their significant economic, social, and political clout to back community economic development efforts in neighborhoods beset by disinvestment and deindustrialization, often with a distinctly entrepreneurial streak.

In 1985, for example, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit formulated a

plan in which the church purchased vacant land in the northwest part of the city and set about on a massive redevelopment project. Over the course of several years, and through the generous donations of congregants, the church managed to lease the land to several black-owned fast food franchises, a large shopping center, and a new housing project, dramatically increasing the value of the land and the economic fortunes of the neighborhood.<sup>322</sup> The pastor of Hartford Memorial, Rev. Charles Adams, argued in a 1993 interview that projects such as his were, by necessity, at the core of the black church's mission in the absence of economic institutions that provided for African American communities.<sup>323</sup>

Collectively, the black churches in the United States were a potent economic force during the period and after. A 1981 study estimated that African Americans contributed over \$1.5 billion to black churches nationally, with over 90% of black philanthropy funneled through churches and church-affiliated organizations.<sup>324</sup> Black church leaders recognized the distinctive position they occupied as potential facilitators of urban economic development and pioneered new ways of doing so that responded to the shifting economic landscape of cities in the 1980s. In the absence of outside capital and the steady erosion of jobs in African American communities, churches became the institutions of last resort to revitalize devastated neighborhoods.

Beginning in the 1980s, the witness of mainstream churches on matters of

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<sup>322</sup> See Lloyd Gite, *The New Agenda of the Black Church: Economic Development for Black America*. *Black Enterprise*, 12, 1993. 54, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/217906209?accountid=14707> (accessed April 24, 2015).

<sup>323</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> *ibid.*

economic justice, combined with the embrace by African American churches of ambitious economic development plans, provided the intellectual and practical basis for new approaches on the part of churches to questions of inequality, lack of jobs, and disinvestment in urban neighborhoods. In Los Angeles, this developing commitment of the churches across racial and economic lines to economic justice manifested itself both before and after the divide of the 1992 riots, and in many ways can be traced to the efforts of community organizing and empowerment from earlier decades in the city. Nevertheless, the 1992 riots were a crucial catalyst in the continuing evolution of the social witness of the churches on economic matters. The moral imperatives regarding the economy outlined by the Catholic bishops in “Economic Justice for All” in 1986 reached a crescendo in the fires of 1992, with significant results for the life of Los Angeles and its churches.

### **The Moral Imperative of 1992**

The 1992 Los Angeles riots, like those of 1965 in Watts, became an occasion for the churches to rethink their urban outreach and the quality of their moral witness in the city, particularly around the interlocking issues of race and economic justice.<sup>325</sup> On May 15, 1992, just weeks after the riots, an ecumenical gathering of local Christian leaders

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<sup>325</sup> The literature on the 1992 Los Angeles riots, like their 1965 predecessor, is vast. The best introduction is Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Note that most of the academic literature focuses, rightly in my view, on issues of race, while many religious groups saw the events of 1992 in economic terms.



calling themselves the Los Angeles Theological Reflection Group, among them Luis Olivares, issued a searing indictment of the efficacy of the churches' social witness in the city. Titled "A Christian Confession of Conscience," the statement of the group argued that the Rodney King verdict and subsequent uprising had laid bare the racial and socioeconomic divides of the city, as well as the churches' culpability in failing to adequately address the needs of the oppressed. The group asked all Christians to repent of their silence on social justice issues and to reflect more deeply on the roots of "structural injustice" so that a true rebuilding of Los Angeles could proceed.

The group also provided a list of specific issues for Christians of good conscience to focus on in the aftermath of the riots, including support for community policing strategies, the expansion and enforcement of gun control laws, the ouster of LAPD chief Daryl Gates, and support for a federal civil rights investigation of the four officers acquitted in the beating of Rodney King. Moreover, the church leaders insisted that the INS, which had used the occasion of the riots as a cover for a massive deportation sweep of undocumented immigrants, immediately release those that had been arrested.<sup>326</sup>

In religious terms, the Los Angeles Theological Reflection Group envisioned the events of 1992 as a "time of visitation," making reference to the passage from the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus wept over Jerusalem for its failure to "recognize the things that make for peace." The image was apocalyptic, as Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem because of its people's indifference to injustice. The parallel that the church leaders made was clear: Los Angeles, too, would reap greater discord and destruction if it

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<sup>326</sup> Seth Mydans, "Criticism Grows Over Aliens Seized during Riots." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), May 29, 1992. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/108966796?accountid=14707>.

did not address fundamental issues of racism and poverty in its midst.

If the group's imagery was apocalyptic, its proposed remedies were far more pragmatic, and touched directly on issues of economic justice in Los Angeles. The church leaders argued that the social and spiritual transformation of the city could not occur unless "the poor themselves are empowered as social subjects, not objects of charity," and called for the churches of the city to create a "practical partnership with the poor" which would entail concrete action on the part of congregations to promote economic opportunity and grassroots participation in the city's rebuilding efforts.

In their economic and political recommendations, the Theological Reflection group echoed long-standing themes of postwar social Christianity surrounding citizen participation, grassroots activism, and the empowerment of disadvantaged communities to speak with their own voice in the public sphere. Some of the group's agenda items even drew directly from 1960s efforts such as Project Equality, which had sought to leverage the churches' influence to enact affirmative action policies, with little effect in Los Angeles. Despite this inauspicious history, the church leaders urged that preference be given to minority-owned contractors in the reconstruction effort, and that the city's poor and unemployed be hired to do the work. Underlying the group's concerns was almost certainly a historical sense of how such efforts in the wake of the Watts Riot had failed, with Downtown business interests taking the lead on what would turn out to be a thoroughly unsuccessful attempt to redevelop South-Central Los Angeles. Moreover, there was genuine reason to worry, as Peter Ueberroth, the Orange County businessman best known for his organization of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, had been

tapped by the city to head its redevelopment efforts in 1992 through an organization that eventually became known as Rebuild L.A. In the end, their fears would prove to be well-founded, as Rebuild L.A. accomplished little in the redevelopment of the neighborhoods most directly affected by the riots.<sup>327</sup>

Churches at the national and international level also took a keen interest in the moral and policy implications of the 1992 riots, just as they had in 1965. In June of 1992, a group of delegates from the World Council of Churches (WCC), with representation from Europe, Africa, and Asia, traveled to Los Angeles to conduct two days of public hearings about the civil violence in the city and the ongoing response on the part of the local churches in the city to the crisis. The delegation's purpose was to examine Los Angeles and its social problems to formulate new methods of urban ministry and social witness, but the meeting deteriorated rapidly as Korean and African American church leaders fell into acrimonious debate, as emotions remained raw between the two communities at the very center of the civil unrest.<sup>328</sup> Despite this setback, the WCC and the National Council of Churches (NCC) managed to conclude, much like the Theological Reflection Group had, that the problems of 1992 stemmed more from economic injustice than problems of race and diversity, as real as these were at the time. The NCC, for its part, emerged from Los Angeles with the promise of an "urban Marshall

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<sup>327</sup> As yet, there is little academic literature on Rebuild L.A. For a journalistic, retrospective account of the programs failings, see Ina Jaffe, "After L.A. Riots, a Failed Effort for a Broken City," <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/29/151608071/after-l-a-riots-an-effort-to-rebuild-a-broken-city> (accessed 24 April 2015).

<sup>328</sup> Larry B Stammer, "World Churches to Focus on L.A. Unrest Forum: Council Will Bring Religious Leaders Together at Public Hearings in the Southland to Develop Urban Strategy. it is the First such Effort in the United States." *Los Angeles Times (pre-1997 Fulltext)*: 4. Jun 27 1992. *ProQuest*. Web. 19 Apr. 2015 .

Plan” in which it would pool its collective resources for a renewed commitment to urban ministry and work for economic justice.<sup>329</sup>

Although the 1992 riots were a multiracial event, with many reports claiming that over half of the participants were Latino, it was nevertheless the black churches that most directly grappled with the consequences of the unrest.<sup>330</sup> Whereas the post-Watts response of African American congregations relied heavily on an alliance between Downtown business interests and powerful leaders in the black community, such as the ministers H.H. Brookins and Thomas Kilgore, to rebuild the shattered social and economic infrastructure of African American Los Angeles, the post-1992 version of civic regeneration leaned more toward piecemeal, neighborhood-based efforts to knit together what most leaders, religious and secular, considered to be a dangerously tattered social fabric.

Cecil “Chip” Murray, successor to H.H. Brookins as pastor of First A.M.E. Church (FAME), almost immediately became the moral and religious voice of the city in the aftermath of the Rodney King verdicts, much as his predecessor had in 1965. It was at this church that Mayor Tom Bradley voiced his own personal and political outrage at the outcome of the trial of the white LAPD officers, while Murray, ever the pastor, called for both reconciliation and the equally urgent need to recognize the realities of racism and inequality that led directly, in his view, to the fires and looting of April, 1992.

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<sup>329</sup> Lancaster, Kathy. "Beyond Los Angeles, continued." *Church & Society* 83, no. 1 (September 1, 1992): 116-128. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2015).

<sup>330</sup> Numerous journalistic accounts cited a RAND Corp. study that concluded that 51% of the arrests made during the riots were of Latinos. See Paul Lieberman, “51% of Riot Arrests Were Latino,” *Los Angeles Times* (18 June 1992).

Indeed, Murray and his congregants at FAME were quite literally on the frontlines of the city's response to the unrest, sending out volunteers to patrol sections of South LA that Murray knew were likely to revolt if a not guilty verdict was reached in the case. In many ways, Murray was one of the first public voices to interpret the events of 1992 in terms of the historical memory of 1965, a tendency that has obscured at least as much as it has revealed in terms of the underlying causes of the violence. However, in time Murray would demonstrate a shrewd awareness of how much had changed, both politically and religiously, in the Los Angeles of 1992, and would be on the forefront of a host of new projects designed to leverage these changed realities for what he saw as the greater civic and spiritual good.<sup>331</sup>

Much like the Los Angeles Theological Reflection Group and the WCC delegates, Murray recognized the economic dimensions of the 1992 riots. For the churches in Los Angeles, therefore, the most salient way to “rebuild” the city would be to struggle for economic justice and opportunity for those that rioted, as well as for the millions more with little means of advancement in neoliberal Los Angeles. With the city government severely weakened by the riots at the end of the Bradley administration, these efforts would necessarily entail advocating for economic justice in the private, as well as the public, sector.

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<sup>331</sup> See Cecil L. “Chip” Murray, *Twice Tested by Fire: A Memoir of Faith and Service* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 2012), 47-78.

### **FAME Renaissance and Homeboy Industries: Neoliberal Solutions**

Chip Murray not only provided a moral voice in the wake of the 1992 Rodney King verdicts, but also was among the first and most prominent of Los Angeles' religious community to leverage his congregation's ample resources within the community to help find solutions to the lack of economic opportunities in Los Angeles' many ethnic and minority neighborhoods. Building off of the donations from local business leaders to provide food and other supplies in the immediate aftermath of the civil violence in 1992, Murray was able to eventually acquire a \$1 million pledge from the Disney Corporation to help with the rebuilding efforts in South Los Angeles. With this startup money, Murray and his congregation at First AME founded the FAME Renaissance Economic Development Program (usually known simply as FAME Renaissance). FAME Renaissance grew quickly after 1992, both in terms of its financial resources and its programs on behalf of greater economic opportunity. Disney's original donation soon expanded to include a \$20 million venture capital fund for local entrepreneurs. In addition, FAME Renaissance began offering programs in business training, loan acquisition and management skills, with the goal of empowering grassroots economic activity in South Los Angeles. The organization took as its core values empowerment, family, community, and dignity—terms that slide easily from the religious to the secular realm. As it had in a number of other ways in postwar religious thought and practice, dignity once again was a centerpiece of FAME's economic outreach after 1992. In practical terms, dignity not only had a religious valence, but also an ideological one that

privileged local, grassroots efforts at economic change, reflecting both a conviction that this was the proper horizon for social action, but reflecting too, perhaps, a loss of hope in broader structural transformations of the national or global economy.

Critics warned that the turn of the black churches to an emphasis on social entrepreneurship threatened to undermine the traditional role that African American ministers and their congregations had in the political sphere. During the 1990s, black churches in Los Angeles became primarily known as incubators of black capitalism, rather than as centers of civil rights advocacy and creative partnerships with city government, as they had in previous decades.<sup>332</sup> In the early years of FAME Renaissance, however, executive director Mark Whitlock argued that just such a turn away from a civil rights mentality was necessary for the black churches, adding that the earlier focus on the accumulation of political power had overlooked the larger imperative of creating economic opportunity in the black community.<sup>333</sup> Moreover, Whitlock forcefully argued that political gains were essentially meaningless without direct control of financial resources on the part of African Americans. Although Thomas Kilgore had made a similar argument when he founded the Black Agenda in 1980, Whitlock was able to realize at least some of these goals that had eluded Kilgore and other black ministers a decade or more earlier.

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<sup>332</sup> Susan Anderson, "Saving Grace; African American Churches are Revitalizing Neglected Neighborhoods in Ways More than Spiritual." *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 24, 2000, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/421720228?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).

<sup>333</sup> "Community Activist in Los Angeles Stresses Economic Clout for Blacks." *The Christian Science Monitor (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Mar 08, 1993, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/291209495?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).

Whitlock spoke out against Rebuild L.A., claiming that its reliance on failed top-down approaches to community redevelopment could only result in minimal gains for economically-depressed neighborhoods in the city.<sup>334</sup> Instead, Whitlock envisioned FAME Renaissance as an alternative to Rebuild L.A. that would build up economic growth from the ground up and be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community. In this way, Whitlock echoed the preference of church-based organizations from earlier decades for grassroots mobilization and citizen participation in policy decisions. For Whitlock, however, grassroots participation did not mean using political clout to effect change at the level of local government, as it had for the community organizers of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather, he sought to empower the community to become the stewards of its own economic fortunes, bypassing what he perceived to be an ineffectual government.

In time, FAME Renaissance became a primary conduit for capital investment in South-Central Los Angeles. The organization's first foray into stimulating economic growth in the area took the form of small loans, in the range of \$2,000 to \$20,000, to minority entrepreneurs interested in starting businesses in South-Central. The loan program grew out of the initial investment that Disney and other corporations had donated to FAME Renaissance in the immediate aftermath of the 1992 riots, with both community leaders and business executives agreeing that lack of economic opportunity was the primary driver of the civil unrest.<sup>335</sup> In the program's first five years, it loaned

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<sup>334</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> In my research, I have found that it was surprisingly commonplace for civic and business leaders, and even community activists, to downplay the role that race played in the 1992 riots, despite racially-biased policing being the very much at the center.



out over \$1.4 million to these entrepreneurial ventures, and with the help of an additional grant from the U.S. Commerce Department was able to even further expand its lending program in the late-1990s.<sup>336</sup>

FAME Renaissance was not only a microlender, but also a training ground for would-be entrepreneurs among various minority communities in Los Angeles. The organization required that those whose requested loans create a business plan that would be reviewed and vetted by FAME staffers keen on determining the viability of the fledgling businesses. FAME envisioned this process not only as a prudent business practice, but as inherently educational, preparing minority business-owners to one day deal with banks and other potential investors with the knowledge they had gleaned from going through the process of applying for a small loan from FAME Renaissance.

FAME Renaissance was just one of many such organizations that developed in Los Angeles and elsewhere among historically-black congregations which increasingly emphasized the development of economic capacity within minority communities. In Los Angeles, FAME Renaissance was soon joined by the West Angeles Church of God in Christ, which brought similar lending programs and business loans to the Westside, just as FAME had done in South Central. Like FAME, the West Angeles Church's efforts in economic development relied on the strong financial base of the church, which counted

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<sup>336</sup> Joyce Jones and Tomika DePriest, "Black Churches are Bringing the Gospel of Economic Development to Inner City Communities," *Black Enterprise*, 02, 1997. 195, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/217903449?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).

many African American celebrities among its congregants.<sup>337</sup> Together with similar efforts in other cities, the social witness of the African American churches on economic matters in this period continued a shift away from civil rights issues and toward opening up the untapped market of urban minority communities.

African American congregations were not the only churches involved in stimulating economic development in Los Angeles in the 1990s. Although the financial structure of Roman Catholic parishes generally precluded the kinds of efforts mounted in African American congregations, many organizations emerged out of Catholic parishes that were also committed to fostering economic opportunity in the city, especially in Latino neighborhoods.<sup>338</sup>

Homeboy Industries, established by the Catholic priest (and immigrants' rights activist) Greg Boyle, similarly drew upon models from the business world to provide a range of services for so-called "at-risk" youth. Rather than provide seed money and classroom training as FAME Renaissance had, however, Boyle chose to make Homeboy Industries a business unto itself. However, Homeboy Industries was the end result of a long process that began at the Dolores Mission parish's community organizing activities, which existed under the banner of an affiliated organization called *Proyecto Pastoral* ("Pastoral Project"). Combining the liberationist thought he had acquired in Bolivia,

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<sup>337</sup> See, for example, Reve Gibson, "An Inside and Outside Scoop of Hollywood." *Sentinel*, Feb 01, 2001, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/369334828?accountid=14707> (accessed April 24, 2015). Magic Johnson, the former NBA star, was a congregant at West Angeles Church and became a notable black entrepreneur in the city, especially through his chain of movie theaters.

<sup>338</sup> The financial structure of Catholic archdioceses make it difficult for individual parishes to accumulate financial resources as any surplus is given back to the bishop to redistribute to other parishes or works. Therefore, the Catholic efforts described here were established as organizations outside the parish structure, even though they often emerged from specific parishes.

honed in the immigrants' right struggle, Boyle was committed to notions of grassroots activism and social change as the primary means to instantiate economic justice.

Boyle was from a prominent family in Los Angeles and grew up in one of the city's most exclusive neighborhoods, Hancock Park. After attending the Jesuit high school in Los Angeles, Boyle entered the Jesuit order in 1972, where he embarked on a long program of work and study before he was ordained a priest in 1984. During his formation as a priest, Boyle traveled to Bolivia, which he claimed "freed" him to to pursue direct work with the poor and marginalized, rather than the more institutional work in high schools and universities that many of his Jesuit peers engaged in.<sup>339</sup> It was there that Boyle encountered first-hand the work that grassroots Catholic activists were doing, inspired by Latin America liberation theology, to empower the poor and advocate for social change.<sup>340</sup>

Boyle's first assignment as a priest was to be the pastor of Dolores Mission Church in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles, a historic area that had long been a center of Latino Catholic activism in the city.<sup>341</sup> While serving in that capacity, Boyle transformed the parish in an important center for immigrants' rights activism and a

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<sup>339</sup> This account can be found in the one book-length study of Boyle and his ministry among gang members in Los Angeles: Celeste Fremon, *G-Dog and the Homeboys: Father Greg Boyle and the Gangs of East Los Angeles* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 2008, 1-17. Much of my description of his ministry is adapted from Fremon, but also based on my own familiarity with Homeboy Industries.

<sup>340</sup> Like much of Latin America, Bolivia was known for grassroots social justice initiatives, often begun by priests and women religious imbued with a liberation theology sensibility. Just one of many such examples is the Fe y Alegria movement, which provides alternative education for the poor, often in rural areas.

<sup>341</sup> Although it focuses on an earlier period, the best introduction to Boyle Heights remains George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1993, 151-170.

homeless shelter for the undocumented poor of the neighborhood, most of whom were undocumented.<sup>342</sup> Together with his fellow Jesuit, Michael Kennedy, and the Claretian Luis Olivares, Boyle was a key figure in not only advocating on behalf of the undocumented, but also in creating an institutional base for the practice of Latin American liberation theology in Los Angeles.

While at Dolores Mission, Boyle helped establish “Christian base communities” in order to identify and address the needs of the community. Base communities were the primary unit of praxis for Latin American liberation theology. In the Latin American context, base communities assembled *campesinos*, often illiterate and uneducated, under the tutelage of a priest, woman religious, or lay volunteer in small groups. These groups would reflect on Scripture in the light of the concerns of the community, often identifying social justice concerns and discerning concrete action that could be taken to address the issue. For the oligarchs in places such as El Salvador, these base communities came to be seen as proto-revolutionary cells and threats to the dominant social order, despite the non-violent nature of the groups.

In Boyle Heights in the 1980s, a community that was transitioning from a predominantly Mexican American barrio to one with a diverse mixture of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, Christian base communities served the same purpose of identifying the most urgent needs of the community in the light of the call to social justice found in Scripture, especially the Prophets. In addition to pressing concerns surrounding poverty, homelessness, and the plight of poor immigrants, the greatest

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<sup>342</sup> A deeper discussion of this may be found in Chapter 5 of this project.

challenge facing Boyle Heights at the time was the proliferation of violent street gangs in the neighborhood.

Boyle Heights had a long history of Mexican American street gangs, and by the 1980s dozens of gangs claimed territory in the neighborhood as small as a block or two. Moreover, instability in the international drug trade had led to an increase in violence among both Mexican American gangs on the Eastside and their African American counterparts in South-Central Los Angeles.<sup>343</sup> While the LAPD carried out its notorious anti-gang program, Operation HAMMER, Greg Boyle recognized that the problem of gangs in the neighborhood was not primarily one of crime, but of economic justice, or the lack thereof.

The precursor to Homeboy Industries was the mid-1980s job training program for gang members called Jobs for a Future, which in many ways replicated Great Society-era job training programs from the 1960s. The programs provided by Jobs for a Future attempted to be comprehensive, comprising an alternative school, daycare center, classroom-based job training, and gang prevention counseling. Boyle later noted the similarities of Jobs for a Future with Great Society programs, registering both his regret that the government-sponsored initiatives of the 1960s did not do more for the poor, while also criticizing their layers of bureaucracy.<sup>344</sup> Boyle envisioned Jobs for a Future

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<sup>343</sup> For a discussion of Operation HAMMER, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso), 1990, 258ff.

<sup>344</sup> Tim Rutten, "Preaching a Partnership with the Poor." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, May 10, 1991, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/281458235?accountid=7418> (accessed April 20, 2015).

as an active “partnership with the poor” in which economically marginalized became the “interpreters of their own experience,” in the manner taught by liberation theology.<sup>345</sup>

As it was for many religious leaders, the events of 1992 provided an impetus to retool Jobs for a Future into Homeboy Industries, which began as a small commercial bakery in the aftermath of the riots. Once again the goal was job training, but in the absence of actual industrial jobs in Boyle Heights, Homeboy Industries provided them by becoming a small business. Furthermore, Boyle hoped that Homeboy Industries would become a place of reconciliation between rival gang members, as members of enemy gangs would be forced to work side-by-side as they worked in Homeboy’s bakery in Boyle Heights.

In the years after the 1992 riots, Homeboy Industries expanded to include a silk-screening shop in an industrial area near Downtown Los Angeles, a landscaping business, and a restaurant run by gang-affiliated young women called Homegirl Cafe. In addition, Homeboy Industries provided a range of services designed to help transitioning gang members find meaningful employment outside the confines of the organization, including tattoo removal and psychological counseling. In the best-case scenario, former gang members left their jobs at Homeboy Industries with marketable job skills and a path toward economic self-determination.

In important respects, Homeboy Industries embodied the tenets of economic justice set forth in “Economic Justice for All” by practicing a preferential option for the poor, expanding economic opportunity to a marginalized population, and placing the

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<sup>345</sup> *ibid.*

needs of actual people at the center of its business model. In other ways, however, the model of Homeboy Industries represented the constrained options available to religiously-affiliated organizations in neoliberal Los Angeles. Unlike earlier manifestations of social Christianity, which had emphasized agitating for radical changes to the political and economic foundations of society, Homeboy Industries rehabilitated gang members by helping them find places within the existing social structure. By being employed in the various businesses operated by Homeboy Industries, Boyle claimed, they could learn the fundamental “soft skills” necessary for economic success in their post-gang lives, such as “learning to show up on time, every day, and taking orders from disagreeable supervisors.”<sup>346</sup>

As opportunities to cooperate directly with government to solve social problems dwindled, models of urban ministry drawn from the emerging world of social entrepreneurship began to seem more viable, even to practitioners of prophetic politics like Boyle and his fellow Catholic activist, Diane Donoghue of the South Central Organizing Committee.

Esperanza Community Housing grew out of the community organizing activity of a Catholic woman religious, Sister Diane Donoghue, who had been active for many years in church-based social justice work in Los Angeles.<sup>347</sup> Donoghue was a member of a community of Catholic women religious known as the Sisters of Social Service, which

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<sup>346</sup> Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 8-9.

<sup>347</sup> “Woman religious” is the preferred term in the Church for women who are members of apostolic, or non-cloistered, religious communities, as opposed to “nuns” who are cloistered and contemplative.

boasted a long history of community outreach and social engagement in the city.<sup>348</sup> After a stint as the lead community organizer at St. Vincent's Catholic Church in mid-city Los Angeles, Donoghue set out to establish a low-income housing cooperative that would allow the mostly poor, immigrant population of the neighborhood to find affordable options in the housing market.

The impetus for the formation of Esperanza Community Housing was a battle with a local garment manufacturer, the Kluger Company, which in 1987 unveiled plans to build an expansive new facility in the largely Latino neighborhood surrounding St. Vincent's Church. Officials on the Los Angeles City Council considered Kluger's move to be an economic boon to a depressed neighborhood, and provided ample tax breaks and incentives to facilitate the company's move from the Garment District to mid-city. The Council cited the neighborhood's need for jobs, as well as the area's designation as the "Central City Enterprise Zone," as an unassailable argument in favor of the garment manufacturer's move into the area and put the business on a fast track for relocation. However, community activists, many of whom were affiliated with the church-based South Central Organizing Committee (SCOC), argued that the factory would lead to other industrial outfits moving into the neighborhood, depleting an already tight housing stock.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Teresa Watanabe, "Religion; Sisters Still Standing Up; Speaking Out; the Sisters of Social Service, Celebrating their 75-Year Jubilee, Follow the Activist Vision of their Founder to Fight Poverty and Injustice." *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 16 2002. *ProQuest*. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.

<sup>349</sup> Scott Harris, "A Bitter Battle on Home Turf: Garment Plant is Not Welcome." *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), Oct 25, 1987, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/903685671?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).



Despite the fact that Kluger was able to secure a promise from the city of a low-interest loan to move his factory to mid-city, Donoghue and the SCOC proved a formidable adversary.<sup>350</sup> The SCOC showed up in great numbers to meeting of the Planning Commission in 1987, demanding that their views on the proposed redevelopment of the neighborhood be heard. Donoghue and the other community activists were ultimately successful, blocking the planned relocation of the Kluger garment factory to the neighborhood, despite loud protests from the City Council.<sup>351</sup>

Even in victory, Donoghue knew that the real issue for the community was not so much keeping factories out of the neighborhood, but finding a way to bring affordable housing in. Donoghue spent three years after the successful fight against the Kluger factory's relocation to get the neighborhood re-zoned for private homes, and another four years securing funding for low-income housing. With the rise of public-private partnerships in the city after the 1992 riots, Donoghue was able to raise funds from a number of organizations, including the California Equity Fund, Wells Fargo and the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, to establish Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, which opened its first project in 1994.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Tom Furlong, "Rating the Enterprise Zone," *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Dec 16, 1990, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/281286162?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).

<sup>351</sup> Scott Harris, "A Bitter Battle on Home Turf: Garment Plant is Not Welcome." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, Oct 25, 1987, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/903685671?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).

<sup>352</sup> Bryan Cotton, "Affordable Housing Opens to Assist Low-Income Families." *Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005)*, Oct 06, 1994, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/565576354?accountid=7418> (accessed April 21, 2015).

Villa Esperanza, as the first project was called, was a 33-unit low-income housing development designed to be affordable for large families subsisting on minimum wage jobs, charging rents well below the average for the surrounding neighborhood. But Donoghue wanted more from the project than simply a way for families to make their monthly rent, imagining the project to be a way for poor families to enjoy the deeper bonds of community. To this end, Donoghue included an adult education program, after-school activities, and an on-site day care center to help the poor, mostly immigrant, families navigate the treacherous economic and social currents of 1990s Los Angeles.<sup>353</sup>

In post-1992 Los Angeles, the same business interests that had been Donoghue's adversaries in the campaign against the Kluger Company became key partners in the establishment of Esperanza Community Housing. At the time of Villa Esperanza's opening in 1994, Donoghue praised the public-private partnership that had brought the project into being, calling it a "testament of the commitment of [these] agencies which joined forces for the betterment of this neighborhood."<sup>354</sup> For Donoghue and the other organizers of Esperanza Community Housing, corporations were now seen as vital partners in accomplishing the goals and aspirations of the community, rather than the disruptive force they had been only a few years earlier.

What is striking about FAME Renaissance, Homeboy Industries, and Esperanza Community Housing is the degree to which their religiously-inspired, prophetic witness on behalf of marginalized populations stands together with solutions that take on many of

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<sup>353</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>354</sup> *ibid.*

the characteristics of neoliberalism, especially its trust in markets, or at least market-based institutions such as banks, to provide solutions for economic injustice. In part, this might be explained simply as a response on the part of religious leaders and organizations to an altered political landscape in post-1992 Los Angeles. Absent an activist, liberal government as a suitable partner for its social outreach, churches and other religious groups looked to the business community to fill the void left by the decline of funding for urban social programs. Whereas once churches might have looked to participate in a Great Society, War on Poverty program, they now turned to major local corporations such as Disney to provide necessary capital for local economic development. Indeed, there is a great deal of merit in this view, especially considering how adaptable religious organizations have historically been in meeting the demands of their constituencies and in providing a moral voice that exists both within and outside the prevailing power structures of a given setting. Nevertheless, these neoliberal examples of economic justice work on the part of church-based organizations were not the only ones that developed after the 1992 riots, although they were by far the most visible, and in many ways, the most successful. Church-affiliated organizations also developed more prophetic responses to both the riots and the call toward greater economic justice in Los Angeles, with mixed results.

### **Shalom Zones**

An innovative response on the part of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Los Angeles to the 1992 riots was the establishment of “Shalom Zones” in the city. In the

immediate aftermath of the riots, UMC raised over \$2 million to create community-based networks of social services, political advocacy, and citizen participation in parts of Los Angeles that had been damaged in the riots, as well as in other areas of the city with poor, immigrant populations. The first Shalom Zone was established in the heavily Salvadoran Pico-Union neighborhood in 1993, which had been one of many Latino neighborhoods in Los Angeles that had sustained heavy damages during the civil unrest of the previous year.

Representatives from the UMC framed the launch of the first Shalom Zone in explicitly religious terms, envisioning the project as one that could potentially bring reconciliation and healing to the tattered social fabric of the neighborhood, as well as providing an opportunity for the UMC to re-engage with urban ministry after its emphasis on cities declined after the 1960s. “This is an opportunity for us as a Christian community to renew our commitments, to re-enter [Los Angeles]. This is not a time for timidity or fear, but a time for courage, for creativity and for high resolve to rebuild our communities,” the UMC bishop of Los Angeles, Roy I. Sano, told a gathered crowd at the launch ceremony, while the national head of the UMC, Bishop Joseph Yeakel, claimed that Los Angeles had become a “holy city” in the wake of the riots, and a focus of special concern for the entire UMC.<sup>355</sup>

UMC leaders hoped that first Shalom Zone in Los Angeles could provide not only much-needed assistance in the rebuilding of a shattered neighborhood, but also be a

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<sup>355</sup> Larry B. Stammer, "Methodists Launch Peace, Jobs Program Rebuilding: Bishops Announce Cooperative Effort to Improve Life in Riot-Scarred Los Angeles. the Church Will use it as a Model for Urban Renewal Around U.S." *Los Angeles Times (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, May 04, 1993, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/282025836?accountid=7418> (accessed April 19, 2015).

structure that could bring about a spiritual transformation of the city.<sup>356</sup> The project proceeded, unlike previous mainline Protestant initiatives in urban outreach, without either a formal plan or careful study of the social situation.<sup>357</sup> Rather, volunteers and funds were used to facilitate action in several major areas of concern, including economic empowerment, access to adequate health care, attention to issues of race and gender, as well as the eventual formulation of a strategic plan at the congregation-level to identify future initiatives.<sup>358</sup> Given the broad scope and vague goals of the Shalom Zones, they unsurprisingly met with limited success, often amounting to volunteers simply “hanging out” with the community and engaging in a patchwork of social service ministries.

Despite the imprecision of the Shalom Zones’ goals, in several neighborhoods in Los Angeles they made an crucial, if not lasting, impact. In the Latino community of North Hills, located in the San Fernando Valley, a Shalom Zone volunteer named Evelio Franco used the local UMC as a base from which to engage the neighborhood’s youth, many of whom were involved with gangs, in a number of programs, from soccer teams to judo classes. In addition, Franco provided a number of services for the undocumented immigrant population of the neighborhood, connecting people with immigration lawyers and informing them of their rights. In keeping with the Shalom Zones’ ad hoc nature, many of the services that Franco provided addressed issues as they arose, including

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<sup>356</sup> Sherry Lynn Townsend, "Transforming Congregational Partners' Understanding of Ministry to Communities in Crisis." Order No. 9735135, Drew University, 1997, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304387657?accountid=7418> (accessed April 22, 2015).

<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

intervening with landlords when tenants had a dispute, or confronting the drug dealers who often sought customers among the neighborhood's youth.<sup>359</sup>

Despite limited success, and the absence of broader community strategies to organize political power, the Shalom Zone model took root in several Los Angeles neighborhoods and even overseas, with initiatives in countries such as Zimbabwe and Ghana opening in the late-1990s modeled on the first Shalom Zones in Los Angeles.<sup>360</sup> In terms of economic justice, however, Shalom Zones were far more limited in their impact than the ventures of the African American churches, or even the Catholic Church, in developing the economic capacities of marginalized neighborhoods. With limited funds coming mostly from the UMC itself, the Shalom Zone model's witness to economic justice was constrained from the start, despite its greatest ambitions. In many ways, what the Shalom Zones lacked was a model that conformed to the neoliberal turn in the churches' urban outreach that characterized other, more successful initiatives of the time such as FAME Renaissance. In neoliberal Los Angeles, more prophetic models of ministry, like the biblical prophets before them, were often voices crying out in the wilderness.

## Conclusion

The economic turn of social Christianity in neoliberal Los Angeles marked a

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<sup>359</sup> James Rainey, "Hearts of the City; Street Crusader; Community: From Confronting Drug Dealers to Intervening in Housing Disputes, Evelio Franco Helps Give a Voice to a Poor Neighborhood." *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 02, 1997, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/421116049?accountid=7418> (accessed April 22, 2015).

<sup>360</sup> Virgie W. Murray, "Leaders Gather to Celebrate 10 Years." *Los Angeles Sentinel (1934-2005)*, Nov 28, 2002, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/565767915?accountid=7418> (accessed April 22, 2015).

profound departure from earlier efforts that focused on transforming political structures and providing a prophetic voice on a range of urban issues through the 1980s. In some ways, this was a generational shift, as the church leaders and activists that had been part of the civil rights era and the birth of grassroots community organizing in the city passed from the scene in the 1990s. Moreover, it reflected a renewed emphasis in mainstream Christian social thought in the 1980s that identified economic justice as the most pressing moral concern of the time. In neoliberal Los Angeles, the urgent need for new initiatives to address persistent problems caused by disinvestment in urban neighborhoods and the continued loss of high-paying jobs was obvious across a spectrum of Christian churches in the city, and innovative organizations, from FAME Renaissance to Homeboy Industries, were established to meet the economic challenges of the time.

In important respects, however, the turn toward economic justice on the part of churches represented an abdication of their political voice and an increasing ambivalence toward the role of government in addressing social justice concerns. In a time in which government funding for urban projects was declining, the attitude of church-based activists was not completely unwarranted.

With only a few exceptions, the initiatives described in this chapter did little to marshal direct political pressure in order to address the underlying structures of economic inequality in Los Angeles. Even figures such as Greg Boyle, who had played a significant role in prophetic political activism during the 1980s, had by the 1990s transformed his sense of Christian mission along the lines of social entrepreneurship. Similarly, black churches, long a bastion of civil rights activism in Los Angeles, became

better known in the decade as sources of economic growth and an important locus of black entrepreneurial activity. Organizations such as the Gathering, which had done so much to set the black political agenda as recently as the 1980s, withered in the wake of the 1992 riots, only to be replaced by the FAME Renaissance and other initiatives aimed at strengthening black economic, rather than political, power in the city. In turn, black political activism in Los Angeles largely moved out of the churches, its longtime base of operations.

By drawing such a bright line between politics and the economy, these initiatives failed, in many respects, to recognize the deep relationship between the political and economic orders in neoliberal Los Angeles. Always adaptable, churches and church-based organizations jumped headlong into the changed political and economic landscape of neoliberal Los Angeles and willingly partnered with businesses and embraced market-based solutions to promote economic justice in the city. Many of their gains were real, resulting in the expansion of economic opportunity, the growth of small businesses, and a return of investment to some of the most economically-depressed parts of Los Angeles. Nevertheless, the engines of inequality, including the lack of political will to address the dislocations of a neoliberal economy, remained stubbornly in place.

There were, of course, overwhelming constraints on how much churches and their affiliated organizations could do to address the forces of neoliberalism in Los Angeles. After all, the vision of economic justice outlined in “Economic Justice for All” was designed to be national, or even international, in scope. Moreover, that document had called for the mustering of political power in order to address the fundamental moral



issues of the economy in the United States, with the needs of the poor firmly in view. As the economic policies of both major political parties shifted rightward in the 1980s and 1990s, the possibilities of implementing even some the tenets of “Economic Justice for All” grew remote.

Nevertheless, the Christian vision of economic justice was kept alive in neighborhoods, communities, and churches through the innovative strategies developed by a host of organizations across a wide spectrum of believers in Los Angeles. As ambiguous and rife with lost opportunities as they were, they stood as concrete manifestations of a Christian social vision on the economy that was scarcely in evidence elsewhere in Los Angeles, or in the nation at large. If the churches failed to provide economic justice for all in their “time of visitation,” they succeeded in providing a path toward economic dignity for at least some of the many millions cast to the margins in global Los Angeles.

## Conclusion

In 1999, an organization called Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) staged a protest march in Beverly Hills, with the goal of raising the wages of the exclusive community's many hotel and service workers.<sup>361</sup> About 150 rabbis, Protestant ministers, and Catholic priests, together with lay people, processed down Rodeo Drive carrying a large banner that read, simply but provocatively, "All religions believe in justice." Taking place during the time of Passover and Easter, the marchers carried with them bowls of milk and honey, biblical symbols of God's plenty, and placed them in front of the hotels that paid their workers a living wage. The assembled clergy and laity also carried with them bitter herbs, biblical symbols of captivity and slavery, placing them at the entrances of the many other hotels that refused to raise their workers' wages. Within a few weeks, the hotels that had been adorned with bitter herbs relented, signing a new contract with their workers that greatly enhanced wages and benefits.<sup>362</sup>

Despite the neoliberal turn of the churches' social witness on economic justice in the wake of the 1992 riots, by the decade's end there were signs of a developing relationship between labor activism and a broad spectrum of religious institutions in Los Angeles, from Christian churches to synagogues, mosques, and Buddhist temples.

Moreover, organizations such as CLUE became an important part of a growing strain of

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<sup>361</sup> See Richard Parker, "Progressive Politics and, Uh,...God," *The American Prospect* (17 January 2000), 11, 5, pg. 32.

<sup>362</sup> *ibid.*, 33.

progressive politics in the city that was multiracial, interreligious, and focused squarely on issues of economic and racial justice.<sup>363</sup>

CLUE was established in 1996, with the express purpose of advocating for living wage legislation in Los Angeles. As the economic forces of globalization created an increasing number of low-wage jobs, especially among the city's minority and immigrant populations, religious leaders and activists became concerned about the plight of workers who struggled to survive with few benefits and exceptionally low pay. In collaboration with a number of secular organizations, CLUE prevailed on city officials in 1997 to require that private sector companies that received public funds pay their employees at a higher rate than the current minimum wage.<sup>364</sup> This victory followed a media campaign on the part of religious leaders in Los Angeles that argued from a shared sense of morality that the precarious economic situation of millions of workers in the city could no longer be ignored. As religious leaders, especially from the mainstream Christian churches, had so often in the postwar decades, the argument for a living wage was explicitly framed in terms of human dignity and the inherent dignity of all human labor.<sup>365</sup>

Although CLUE was interreligious in character, including important contributions from Jewish leaders, its efforts to pass living wage legislation in Los Angeles were

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<sup>363</sup> For the best recent discussion of contemporary progressive politics in Los Angeles, and for a historical overview of the same, see Robert Gottlieb, et al., *The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2006.

<sup>364</sup> See Deborah Figart, "Ethical Foundations of the Contemporary Living Wage Movement," *International Journal of Social Economics* (2008) 12, 1, pg. 800-815.

<sup>365</sup> *ibid.*, 816.

deeply rooted in traditions of social Christianity that stretched back for many decades. When Catholic archbishop Roger Mahony wrote in favor of the legislation, he referenced the long-standing Catholic teaching concerning “just wages” that had been a centerpiece of Catholic social teaching since the late-nineteenth century. Moreover, in an American context, Monsignor John Ryan had advocated for a living wage for workers as far back as 1906 and consistently thereafter during his long career of Social Gospel-inflected Catholic social witness. Mainline Protestants, for their part, also drew on Social Gospel traditions in advocating for a living wage, as well as more recent Protestant thought on the economy that shared a deep resonance with Catholic economic thought.<sup>366</sup>

The establishment of CLUE and the campaign for living wage legislation in Los Angeles also represented a new phase in the history of the politics of dignity-- interreligious, multiracial, and increasingly tied to progressive political movements-- and of the city of Los Angeles itself, providing a vantage point from which to take the measure of the development of social Christianity over the long course of the postwar decades, as this project has attempted.

CLUE’s concerns, as well as the composition of the organization, were a concrete manifestation of a number of the developments in Christian social witness that have been described in these pages. Its interfaith character represented the ways in which mainstream Christian churches had forged relationships across denominations and across faith traditions in the postwar period, developing crucial partnerships, especially with Jewish groups, in the advancement of dignitarian social policies. Furthermore, Its

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<sup>366</sup> *ibid.*, 816ff.

concern for the dignity of labor was equally central to postwar Christian social thought, representing a thread that connects the activities of early-Cold War activists such as George Dunne with the campaign for a living wage some five decades later. Finally, CLUE's attention to community empowerment and citizen participation were hallmarks of the churches' social engagement since at least the 1960s, coming into even greater prominence with the rise of the community organizing groups, such as UNO and SCOC, which had such an impact in Los Angeles in the 1970s and 1980s.

By the late-1990s, the politics of dignity, which had emerged in complex ways from the social witness of Christian churches in Los Angeles, had become part of the social and political fabric of a transformed city. The city, which at mid-century was what historian Scott Kurashige has called the nation's "white spot," dominated politically and culturally by a white, politically-conservative, and religiously Protestant elite, had become by the turn of the twenty-first century a global metropolis, with extraordinary levels of racial, ethnic, and religious pluralism, as well high degrees of socioeconomic inequality, residential segregation, and lingering racial tensions.<sup>367</sup> The Christian leaders, activists, and ordinary believers that have populated this study not only navigated these radical changes in the composition of Los Angeles, but also shaped these transformations in a number of critical ways, from civil rights efforts on the part of African Americans and Latinos, to community organizing and outreach to immigrants, just to name a few. In the process, social Christianity was itself transformed.

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<sup>367</sup> See Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2007.

Through their deep engagement with social, political, economic, and religious change in Los Angeles in the postwar decades, mainstream Christian churches developed a distinctive tradition of social witness in the modern metropolis. This project was, in important respects, global in scope, as it sought to implement a Christian moral vision that transcended borders by welcoming immigrants, speaking out against the injustices of an international economic order, and incorporating practices of liberation theology that emerged, especially, from Latin America in the postwar years.

The capaciousness of the postwar Christian social project carried within it great strengths, as well as telling blind-spots. The breadth of Christian social engagement allowed the churches to speak to a host of urban issues with a clarity and scope that more narrowly-focused organizations seldom did in the period. During what historian Daniel Rodgers has called an “age of fracture,” Christian churches fought for a more communitarian vision of American society, in which the fundamental dignity of human beings would be recognized across a wide range of arenas, but most especially in political and economic affairs.

One of the weaknesses of this overarching social vision was the way in which it often tended to downplay the particular ways in which race remained the dominant marker of inequality in urban America in the postwar years. Churches in Los Angeles rightly worked to grapple with the implications of diversity and pluralism within their ranks and in the city at large, but often tended to separate issues of race from their broader concern for economic justice. The explicit linkage of race and economic justice remained alive, unsurprisingly, in the black churches in the period, but even they

witnessed a thinning out of civil rights activism as African American congregations turned toward social entrepreneurship and community development to an increasing degree.

Furthermore, mainstream churches, despite the convergence of their social thought, never quite managed to bridge historical divides, especially among black and white, and Protestant and Catholic congregations. The relative lack of cooperation between Latino Catholic parishes and black churches during the period represented a major obstacle to forming interracial and interdenominational coalitions, even as these churches advocated for many of the same social policy goals. Despite a dramatic increase in ecumenical efforts in the postwar years, lingering mistrust along the twin axes of race and religion significantly hampered the development of even greater forms of solidarity and social witness.

Demographic change also tended to mitigate the possibilities of a truly interdenominational social Christian vision in Los Angeles. As Los Angeles' Latino population grew, so too did its Catholic population, and by the end of the period under discussion here, Los Angeles was a very much a Catholic city again, as Mike Davis and others have pointed out.<sup>368</sup> In becoming the dominant religious institution in Los Angeles, the Catholic Church tended to focus increasingly on the needs of its own flock, prioritizing issues of immigration and the economic development of Latino neighborhoods, and moving away from its earlier emphasis, at least in some quarters, on interracialism and civil rights.

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<sup>368</sup> See Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. Big City* (New York: Verso, 2001).

But perhaps the biggest drawback of the dignitarian politics of the churches was the fact that it tended, by design, to concentrate on empowering small, local communities, often to the detriment of larger-scale efforts toward social change. Historian Daniel Immerwahr has recently written about the pitfalls of community development, giving his study the revealing title of *Thinking Small*.<sup>369</sup> Much like the U.S. agencies that Immerwahr describes, churches embraced the notion that the answer to urban social problems was the empowerment of the poor and the marginalized. Although this emphasis was in many ways laudatory, it had the unintended consequence of withdrawing mainstream Christian social witness from the national stage, even as more conservative Christian groups were pressing their agendas in state houses across the country and in Washington. Although mainstream Christian lobbying groups were active at the state and national level throughout the period, their influence on the larger political agenda of the country, especially after the 1960s, was decidedly muted.

If we are to find evidence of the social thought and practice of the mainstream churches in the postwar decades, we must therefore look not to national politics, but instead to cities such as Los Angeles. It is in cities that the politics of dignity took root, manifesting itself in a host of organizations and initiatives that left a lasting mark on the development of postwar urban politics, from ephemeral efforts to address the urban crisis, to longer-lasting community organizations such as UNO that continue to empower the poor. As newer organizations such as CLUE amply demonstrate, the evolution of the politics of dignity and its impact on Los Angeles continues.

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<sup>369</sup> See Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2015.



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